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**WHAT CAN WE BELIEVE?**

BOOKS BY  
JAMES GORDON GILKEY

A FAITH FOR THE NEW GENERATION

SECRETS OF EFFECTIVE LIVING

THE CERTAINTY OF GOD

SOLVING LIFE'S EVERYDAY PROBLEMS

MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF MODERN DOUBT

MANAGING ONE'S SELF

WHAT CAN WE BELIEVE?

# WHAT CAN WE BELIEVE?

*A Study of the New Protestantism*

BY

JAMES GORDON GILKEY, M.A., D.D.

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SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

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*A small return for twenty years  
of kindness*





## FOREWORD

THERE have been three clearly discernible periods in the long history of Christianity. The first covered the first one hundred and fifty years of our era, and was dominated by Jesus, Paul and John. It is usually called the primitive or apostolic period. The second lasted from the middle of the second century to the beginning of the sixteenth, and was dominated by Athanasius, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. We might term it the period of early Catholicism. The third, the period of early Protestantism, began in 1517 and continued till the closing years of the nineteenth century. Its dominating figures were Luther and Calvin. The thesis of this book is that Christianity has now entered a fourth period in its evolution, the period of the New Protestantism.

The different churches found in the modern world reflect the varying forms of Christian be-

lief and practice which have emerged in these four periods. The Protestant sects which emphasize such doctrines as divine healing and the second coming of Christ are recrudescences of the Christianity which flourished in the first century. Their familiar claim that they represent primitive or apostolic Christianity is a valid one. The Catholic Church of to-day represents the continuation and development of that form of Christianity which began to take shape during the second century. The conservative branch of present-day Protestantism, clinging to a belief in the verbal infallibility of the Bible and retaining a strictly Biblical theology, is the successor of that type of Christianity which Luther and Calvin called into being. The present group of liberal Protestant churches is the matrix within which the New Protestantism, with its new beliefs and its new objectives, is now taking shape.

In the effort to establish and maintain friendly relations between all the Protestant churches many recent religious leaders have deliberately minimized the differences between the Old Protestantism and the New. They have claimed that

the two teach essentially the same doctrines, and that the difference between the two is only a difference in terminology. All of us realize there are many beliefs which the two systems do hold in common, and all of us agree it is of prime importance to establish within Protestantism a better spirit of coöperation. But the attempt to manufacture a superficial and temporary harmony at the cost of concealing significant and irreconcilable differences of attitude and approach seems to some of us a serious blunder. For one thing it will rob Protestantism of the support of that ever-enlarging group which is openly dissatisfied with nineteenth-century orthodoxy and which insistently demands something better. We feel that the wise, and certainly the candid, course for liberals is to confess frankly that their gospel *is* at least partially new, to state clearly what this new gospel is, and then to explain why they feel compelled to proclaim it. This at any rate is the task undertaken by this volume.

In arranging and presenting this material I have tried to do two things. The first is to state the new beliefs in positive fashion, spending as

little time as possible in analyzing and criticizing the beliefs of yesterday. Most laymen—and this book is intended primarily for them—are not interested in being told what they should not believe. Their desire is to hear what beliefs they can accept. In these chapters I have sought to meet their familiar and essentially reasonable demand. I have also deliberately abbreviated my statement of the new beliefs, seeking to prepare a brief and non-technical account of the new convictions rather than produce another bulky and tedious volume on the history and philosophy of the Christian religion. This frank statement will explain, I hope, why this volume says so little about the objectives of the New Protestantism in the fields of religious education and social reform. Each of those subjects demands a book of its own. Here the discussion is deliberately limited to the new beliefs which the new system holds.

Many people, reading these chapters, will note clear similarities between the teaching of the New Protestantism and that of the liberals of the nineteenth century, notably the Unitarians and the

Universalists. Is the new system merely an elaboration and restatement of these earlier systems? Some of us feel that the liberal movement has been gaining size and momentum for many decades, and that to this movement as to a great river many smaller streams have contributed. Early Unitarianism and early Universalism were two of those streams, and two immensely important ones. But the new Bible-study of the later nineteenth century was another such stream, and the socially minded Christianity of the twentieth century still another. To the New Protestantism each of these earlier developments has contributed. We cannot term the new system the exclusive product of any one of the older movements. Rather it is the joint product of all.

J. G. G.

April, 1933  
Springfield, Massachusetts



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WHAT CAN WE BELIEVE?



## CHAPTER I

### THE NEW FOUNDATION OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

#### I

WHEN, four centuries ago, Protestantism began its development it rested its teaching on the twin foundation of the Bible and the conscience of the individual reader. It insisted that the Bible is a divinely inspired and therefore inerrant volume, and that if the ordinary man will read it carefully and interpret it as his divinely enlightened conscience dictates, he will—unassisted by any priest or ecclesiastical organization—find the truth. Naturally the early Protestant leaders added that ordinary individuals should give due weight to the interpretation of Scripture made by men with special training, and that they should also recall the fact that one portion of the Bible often throws light on another. But in the final

analysis the source of authority for early Protestants was the divinely inspired Bible interpreted by the divinely enlightened conscience. Luther stated this basic principle with characteristic vigor. "Thou must not place thy decision on the Pope, nor on any other person. Thou must thyself be so skilful that thou canst say: God says this and not that. Thou must bring thine own conscience into play so that thou mayest boldly and defiantly cry: This is God's word! On it I will risk body and life, and a hundred thousand necks if I had them."

But this practice of resting belief on the Bible and individual interpretation of the Bible soon led, as all of us now realize, to an unexpected and an immense confusion. Some of Luther's successors, studying Paul's phrase "buried with Christ in baptism,"<sup>1</sup> began to insist that the only valid form of baptism is total immersion. Others, studying the Old Testament phrase, "He shall sprinkle many nations,"<sup>2</sup> insisted that sprinkling is adequate. Protestantism thus began to split up into a host of warring sects, each claiming to teach

<sup>1</sup> Colossians 2:12.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 52:15.

the true gospel and each basing its own peculiar doctrines on proof-texts laboriously culled from Scripture. This process has, unhappily, continued until our own time. Some of our contemporaries, seeking to base the practice of total abstinence on a Biblical foundation, quote approvingly the injunction: "Look not on the wine when it is red." <sup>3</sup> A rival group promptly retaliates by repeating the familiar verse, "Use a little wine for thy stomach's sake." <sup>4</sup> The resultant confusion demonstrates once more the impossibility of making every part of the Bible agree with every other, and the futility of attempting to build an authoritative system of doctrine and practice on a purely Scriptural foundation.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century Luther's method of using the Bible and Luther's underlying beliefs about the Bible began to wane. They waned because thoughtful individuals began to study the Bible in a new way. First they investigated the actual text of the Bible, examining with minute care the Hebrew and Greek words from which existing translations had been

<sup>3</sup> Proverbs 23:31.

<sup>4</sup> I Timothy 5:23.

made. Did the evidence indicate that the men who had copied the successive manuscripts of the Bible had been miraculously preserved from error? Or were there indications that on occasion their attention had wandered, and their tired fingers had formed a false letter? This careful study of the text of the Bible, the so-called Lower Criticism, was well under way before the year 1800. Then as the nineteenth century dawned scholars began to ask questions of an even more searching type. Were the statements the Biblical writers made entirely accurate? Granted their words may have been correctly copied and recopied century after century, were the ideas underlying those words true? An ancient Hebrew, for example, had written "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."<sup>5</sup> Assuming that his statement had been correctly transmitted, was the statement itself trustworthy in all its implications? Are there such creatures as witches, or is the ancient belief in witchcraft a blunder of primitive minds? This new study of the ideas advanced by the Bible, the so-called Higher Criticism, was wide-

<sup>5</sup> Exodus 22:18.

spread by the middle of the nineteenth century. It pointed forward relentlessly to a momentous change in the very basis of Protestant belief.

What was the final result of these two new forms of Bible study? By the year 1900 well-informed Protestants knew two facts about the Scriptures which Luther had never suspected. The first is that the Bible contradicts itself in scores of places. The second is that many of the statements the Bible makes are demonstrably false. When the knowledge of these two facts became general, Protestantism entered a period of grave crisis—the period in which it still stands. To-day Protestantism must either find a new foundation of belief and erect on that foundation a new and more accurate system of teaching, or lose the confidence of the reflective members of the community. Luther's doctrines may have been convincing for the individuals who, four centuries ago, accepted his beliefs about the Bible. They are not convincing for a generation which has discovered that the Bible is not infallible.

## II

As these difficulties became apparent at the beginning of the twentieth century, two new foundations for Protestant teaching were suggested. Some leaders claimed that a belief is proved true if that belief "adds value to life." When, for example, we find that by believing there is a God who loves us we gain a new and helpful sense of security, we can claim this belief has been verified. We can insist there is such a God. Meantime other leaders began to say that in the "spiritual intuitions" of religiously gifted individuals we find an adequate basis for belief. Because, for example, certain great men have felt sure of continued individual existence after death, we lesser mortals can confidently assert such existence is certain.

Many of the current volumes on liberal Protestant belief reflect one or both of these attitudes, and rest their argument on one or both of these alleged methods of proof. Thus one of our most widely circulated textbooks on theology claims, "The final proof of Christianity is that it gives a



more satisfying view of the world than any other.”<sup>6</sup> Thus scores of contemporary preachers give as their argument for God’s love the fact that Jesus, Paul, and many other great religious leaders have believed in that love. Such preachers, recognizing the weakness of the ancient appeal to proof-texts but being uncertain where a new source of religious authority is to be found, argue that if we follow our intuitions or the intuitions of religious geniuses we invariably find the truth. It is this curious logic which has led to the frequent and enthusiastic quotation of a sonnet by George Santayana.

O world, thou choosest not the better part!  
It is not wisdom to be only wise  
And on the inward vision close the eyes  
But it is wisdom to believe the heart.  
Columbus found a world but had no chart  
Save one that faith deciphered in the skies,  
To trust the soul’s invincible surmise  
Was all his science and his only art.  
Our knowledge is a torch of smoky pine  
That lights the pathway but one step ahead

<sup>6</sup> W. A. Brown, *Christian Theology in Outline*, p. 46.  
Charles Scribner’s Sons.

Across the void of mystery and dread;  
Bid then the tender light of faith to shine  
By which alone the mortal heart is led  
Into the thinking of the thought divine.<sup>7</sup>

That Columbus had adequate reasons for making his voyage, and that he was following a path charted by intelligence rather than disclosed by faith, is entirely forgotten. To "believe the heart" is recommended as the ultimate wisdom, in religion as well as in exploration.

But anyone who analyzes these two current arguments will soon locate their fatal weakness. Many beliefs which would add great value to life are patently and demonstrably unfounded. To believe that one has unlimited funds in the bank would bring a superb feeling of security, but does that feeling prove the cash is in the vault? The intuitions of some people may correspond with the facts, but the intuitions of others may prove—and often do prove—to possess no such correspondence. How can we know which intuitions to accept and which to reject? In a recent magazine article Mr. Elmer Davis has given the final

<sup>7</sup> *Poems: Selected by the Author and Revised.* Charles Scribner's Sons.

answer to the ill-advised attempt to base modern religious teaching on "the tender light of faith." He writes, "Eddington claims he has intuitions of a personal relationship between himself and something he calls God. But Einstein and Jeans, two scientists quite as reputable as Eddington, report no such intuitions. You say they are spiritually deaf, not tuned in on a broadcast waiting for them? Maybe, and maybe not. The trouble with intuitions is that they cannot be checked. In the final analysis it is one man's intuitions against another man's, and no one can prove which man is right or whether either is right. Modern Protestantism has a healthy distrust of authoritative dogma. But intuitions form a very sandy foundation for such a pretentious skyscraper as modernist theology proposes to raise." <sup>a</sup>

### III

In this critical situation what should Protestantism do? The only thing liberal Protestantism can do is locate a new foundation for its teaching and

<sup>a</sup> See his article "God without Religion" in *Harper's Magazine* for March, 1930.

then build on that new foundation whatever structure of belief—large or small—can be erected there. Many of our thoughtful leaders are now engaged in this effort. The new foundation on which they are building is the foundation on which modern science has built for many decades—the foundation of experience and reason. To state the matter more definitely, the religious beliefs they accept for themselves and teach to others represent logical inductions drawn from facts provided by experience and reason. Perhaps an analogy will make plain the striking difference between this new foundation of belief and the foundations Protestantism has employed in the past.

Once upon a time four shipwrecked sailors were cast upon an unknown island. They were anxious to learn whether the island was inhabited, and they agreed to walk in different directions and see if they could locate any human beings. When they met again all four agreed there were other people on the island, but their reasons for holding this belief were curiously divergent. The first sailor said he knew the island was inhabited

because he had found an authoritative book which told him so. The second sailor said he knew there were people on the island because this belief gave him a priceless sense of security. The third sailor reported he had had an intuition that the island was inhabited, and that he had implicit confidence in intuitions. The fourth sailor said that on his journey of exploration he had found a hut which, obviously, was in use. Though he did not succeed in getting a glimpse of the occupant, he knew there was such an occupant. He knew this because this conclusion was a logical induction from the evidence which confronted him.

The meaning of this parable is plain. Our human race has been cast on a tiny island called Earth, an island lost in almost measureless seas of Space. For centuries men have been trying to discover whether there is Someone Else—a Being they vaguely call God—here on the island with them. This quest for God is the essential business of all religions, Christianity included. Hitherto Protestantism has based its belief in God's presence here on one or more of the arguments ad-

vanced by the first three sailors in the parable. Now the liberal wing of Protestantism is beginning to base its belief, and all its subsidiary and derived beliefs, on the argument advanced by the fourth. This momentous change is taking place in our own time, and it is our reason for saying that Protestantism has now reached the beginning of a new phase in its evolution.

#### IV

Will a religious system which bases all its teaching on logical inductions drawn from the facts of experience and reason have any place for the statements found within the Bible, and for the beliefs of great religious leaders in the past? Whenever the statements of Scripture and of early religious leaders are in accord with the facts established by experience and reason, those statements are promptly and gladly accepted by the New Protestantism. Whenever those statements fail to meet this test they are quietly laid aside. This is, of course, the method already followed—though followed unconsciously—by most of our contemporaries as they read the Bible or study

the religious convictions of earlier generations. Why, when we find in the New Testament the explicit statement that epilepsy is caused by demons,<sup>9</sup> do we reject that theory as untrue? Because it conflicts with innumerable facts now established by experience and reason. Why, when we find in the same New Testament the statement that there is a God whose love surrounds us all,<sup>10</sup> do we accept this second statement though we rejected the first? Because we are convinced this second statement is in accord with the facts experience and reason have established. The New Protestantism, building frankly on a new foundation, does not reject in cavalier fashion the religious convictions of every era but its own. What it does do is subject those convictions to the fairest and surest test the human race knows—the test of careful and intelligent analysis.

Can the New Protestantism, working on this theory, create such an elaborate and impressive system of doctrine as the one devised by the Old Protestantism? Obviously not. When beliefs are based on proof-texts there is almost no limit to

<sup>9</sup> Mark 9:17-29.

<sup>10</sup> Romans 8:35-39.

the number of beliefs which can be erected. The reason is there are numberless Bible verses to build on. When beliefs are based on intuitions, or on the theory that any idea which adds value to life is thereby proved true, there is similarly no limit to the number of beliefs which can be advanced. But when we accept as true only those beliefs which represent logical inductions from the facts of experience and the conclusions of reason, then we limit sharply the area of our knowledge and the length of our creed. Repeatedly we are driven to confess there are questions we cannot answer, situations we cannot explain. Yet short though the new creed must be, to an ever-increasing number of people it is proving adequate. It gives them the three things a vital religious faith should supply—an interpretation of life, a group of attitudes and practices growing out of that interpretation, and the release and enlargement of inner spiritual power. To a study of the brief but adequate creed of the New Protestantism we now turn.



## CHAPTER II

### A MODERN CONCEPTION OF GOD

#### I

IN the preceding chapter we compared the human race to a group of sailors marooned on a tiny, unfamiliar island lost in a vast expanse of sea. We suggested that the best way by which to determine whether there is Someone Else on the island is to explore the island carefully and from the facts thus discovered draw reasonable inductions. Suppose we study our world with this end in view. In spite of many confusions and uncertainties four significant situations emerge.

To begin with, our world reveals an indubitable and dominant element of order. Processes ranging all the way from the vast movements of the planets to the infinitesimal vibrations of atoms continue with unfailing regularity and almost incredible precision. One of our American scien-

tists goes so far as to say, "The orderliness of the universe is the supreme discovery of science."<sup>1</sup> Granted there is also disorder in the world, particularly in those areas in which human beings have been at work. The dominant impression conveyed by the world and the world-process is the impression of arrangement rather than blind chaos. What does this pervasive and persistent orderliness imply? Does it suggest that our world is the product of blind forces working haphazardly, or does it indicate that some sort of a Mind-and-Power is in ultimate control?

We also discover an apparent element of adjustment between the many different processes continually going on. Our world is not only in order at the moment, but seems to possess the power to keep itself in order though everything is undergoing incessant change. In each living form, for example, we discover a constant mutual adjustment of many separate processes. Meantime the living form as a whole maintains an ingenious and persistent adjustment of itself to the

<sup>1</sup> F. R. Moulton in *The Nature of the World and of Man*, p. 30. University of Chicago Press.

surrounding environment. Most impressive of all, that environment—though constantly undergoing change—maintains itself in such a state that the living forms within it can continue to exist. As a result of these innumerable and never-failing adjustments life goes on. What conclusion shall we draw from facts like these? Shall we say such a world originated in chance and maintains itself by coincidence, or shall we conclude there is—behind the strange web of circumstance—a consistent Mind-and-Power?

Quite as impressive is the element of intelligence which emerges everywhere about us. It makes its appearance even in the lowest forms of animal life, though there no one knows whether it should be termed intelligence or merely instinct. As we climb higher in the scale of living things this element becomes steadily more impressive, and when we reach the level of human life it assumes immensely significant proportions. Furthermore as the evolutionary process advances, this capacity for intelligent action grows steadily greater. In our own time it has won the immense scientific knowledge now at our disposal, and has

enabled us to reconstruct and in a measure control the environment within which we find ourselves. How are we to explain this intelligence? Could it be the product of non-intelligent matter manipulated for countless æons by non-intelligent force, or is it more reasonable to conclude there is at the heart of things a Great Mind which has somehow conveyed to living forms in ever-increasing measure its own power to think and create?

One other fact bears itself in upon an observant mind. As the centuries pass, the life-process reveals a slow but fairly consistent forward-movement. History proves to be the record of related events and developing powers rather than a mere succession of chaotic and essentially meaningless happenings. Granted that the nineteenth-century notion of a steady and inevitable progress which makes life nobler and better year after year, has been demolished by the tragic happenings of the twentieth century. Granted that the movement of history—human and subhuman—must be represented by an irregular and erratic spiral rather than by a smooth, oblique line pointing steadily upward. Any careful study of history indicates

that life-as-a-whole does move in a fairly consistent direction—toward greater complexity of structure, finer adjustment, smoother operation, and a greater range of accomplishment. Progress toward finer values is not an illusion. What conclusion shall we draw from this fact? To many of us this fact, and the other facts we have mentioned, warrant this induction. They indicate there is, here on the little island with us, a Greater Mind and a Greater Power. That is the reality we call God. Our belief in God is not based on proof-texts, intuitions, or values accruing from an idea. Our belief is a logical induction drawn from the facts of experience and reason.

## II

Can we learn anything about God? In particular, can we discover whether He is friendly toward us? The simple way by which to answer this question is to refer the questioner to a supernatural revelation, an intuition, or the sense of security which belief in God's love inevitably awakens within human hearts. But suppose this method of proof is no longer satisfactory. Can we, working

solely on logical inductions drawn from the facts of experience and the conclusions of reason, reach faith in God's friendliness?

Here again there are several situations in our world which make a significant impression on a reflective mind. To begin with, we discover in the world an immense amount of beauty which human beings did not create and for which they are in no way responsible. The vast splendors of dawn and sunset, the delicate tracteries of flower-petal and snowflake, the rainbow glory shimmering on the scales of a fish lifted from the water—here are familiar portions of a loveliness which permeates our world but which we ourselves did not call into being. Granted there are elements of ugliness as well as elements of beauty in our environment. The latter seem more numerous than the former, and seem to emerge in inevitable profusion when Nature is left to develop in her own way. What type of Mind and Power would be responsible for such a pervasive and persistent loveliness? What does the inherent beauty of the world tell us about the character of God?

Equally significant is the fact that in the long

run truth and right win an inevitable victory over falsehood and wrong. They prove to possess a distinct survival-value. Human beings may believe for centuries that a certain theory is true, but if there is not an actual correspondence between this interpretation of the facts and the facts themselves, the belief is certain to be overthrown. Cruelty, injustice, and greed may flourish for a time, but long human experience indicates there is something in the nature of things pledged to their destruction. After a lifetime spent in the study of history James Anthony Froude made this arresting statement: "The lesson of history is that this world is built on moral foundations. In the long run it is well with the good, and ill with the wicked. This is the only teaching which history repeats with any distinctness." What does such a situation tell us about the Power-behind-life? Can we not read back from the essential quality of the thing created to the essential quality of the Creator?

But the most revealing fact is still to be mentioned. In every normal human life we find an immense amount of love, love so deep that it read-

ily becomes self-forgetful and even self-sacrificial. Centuries ago Jesus, noting the love of Galilean parents for their children, said quietly, "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven!"<sup>2</sup> From a dominant quality in human life Jesus argued back to a presumable dominant quality in the Ultimate Source from which human life has come. Is Jesus' reasoning not sound? Could we have a world containing so much love and loyalty, so much tenderness and devotion, if there were not at the heart of things a God who Himself knows and shares these feelings?

Thus the New Protestantism expands by one more term the tentative definition of God suggested earlier in this chapter. We believe that a Being who would fill the world with inherent beauty, who would make truth and right mightier than their opposites, and who would make love the strongest emotion in human hearts, must Himself be loving rather than cruel, friendly toward us rather than indifferent to us. By God,

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 7:11.



then, we mean the Mind, the Power, and the Goodness working in and through the life-process. We realize that many of the men in the past, notably those who wrote the finest passages in the Bible, held this same conviction. How they reached it we cannot say, for we have the record of their conclusions rather than the record of the successive steps by which they reached those conclusions. But from what fragments of evidence have survived we feel that they too based their convictions on a process of inductive reasoning. Their conclusions we share and their faith we accept, but we do so because our own logic leads us to these convictions. We believe God loves us not because Jesus said so, but because the same facts which led him to that conclusion lead us to it too.

How do we picture the activity of such a God? We believe that before our Earth came into being a Great Mind conceived the idea of the Earth. Then a Great Power set in motion the vast forces which, operating through millions of years, brought the Earth into existence and eventually covered it with living forms. Meantime a Great

Goodness so directed the operation of those forces that, working without further interference from outside, they gradually and inevitably produced a world characterized by beauty rather than ugliness, truth and right rather than falsehood and wrong, and an ever-growing wisdom, skill, and kindness in evolving humanity. This Mind and Power and Goodness are, of course, not separate entities. They are three different elements in the personality of God. Granted there are many things about God we do not know, and many we may never find out. Our knowledge, gained by a process of logical induction rather than an act of blind faith, is still ample enough to warrant the conclusion that Someone Else is here on the Earth with us, and the further conclusion that He is our friend rather than our enemy.

### III

A statement of this argument and these conclusions usually provokes, particularly from student groups, three interesting questions. The first has emerged frequently during our argument. If from the happier phases of our experience we draw the

induction there is a God who is both intelligent and kindly, why do we not draw from the darker phases of our experience the induction there is a Devil who is stupid and cruel? Will our logic not prove the second quite as truly as the first?

The answer to this question might be elaborated at great length but its two essential points can be stated briefly. To begin with, the evidence adduced by modern science indicates our world is a unit under the control of one system of laws and presumably One Power, rather than a battlefield on which the two contending forces of Good and Evil are struggling. The dualistic interpretation of life has been fading for many centuries. The major cause of its decline has been the advance of science. As scientific knowledge has increased, the figure of Satan has become more and more indistinct. To-day that figure has all but vanished. Hence though most people draw from one element in life the induction of a God they do not draw from the opposite element the induction of a Devil. They explain in another way, as we shall try to do in a later chapter, the darker phases of human experience.

But there is another and a far more significant point to be noted. The good and the evil in our world are not in equal balance. The good predominates, and as the centuries pass its predominance becomes gradually more apparent. We suggested this fact earlier in this chapter when we said such qualities as beauty, truth, righteousness, and love have a superior survival-value. In the end they endure, while their opposites perish. What does this fact imply? It implies that our world springs from one source rather than two; that the effort of the One Power behind it is to bring into life a progressive amount of beauty, order, and love; and that as time goes on this victory is slowly being gained. Granted that the total life-situation is anything but simple, and that the evidence for a God of love is not so clear or so conclusive as we wish. The life-situation is not so confused and self-contradictory as to drive us back to a dualistic theory, or to lead us to the bitter belief that the issue of the world-struggle is, and must always be, in doubt.

Another question raised by our argument relates

to the connection between God and Nature. Are they identical, or is the Mind-Power-Goodness in which we believe a Power working through Nature to fulfill its purpose? Perhaps the clearest answer to that question is one suggested some years ago by J. Arthur Thomson, the Scotch biologist.<sup>3</sup> Many modern steamships are now equipped with a mechanical steering device called a Gyro-pilot. When the captain charts his course and sets the Gyro-pilot in operation he can thereafter leave the vessel to steer herself. If winds, waves, or undetected currents swing the ship off her course the gyroscope inside the Gyro-pilot detects the deviation and sets in motion an electrical device which turns the rudder and quietly swings the ship back to the true course. Give the Gyro-pilot time and it will, unaided by any outside power, bring the ship exactly where the captain wants her to be. It will do this no matter what difficulties the weather may create. The relation between God and Nature is, so we believe, the same as the relation between the cap-

<sup>3</sup> See J. Arthur Thomson, *Science and Religion*, p. 216. Charles Scribner's Sons.

tain and the Gyro-pilot. The two are not, of course, the same. The Gyro-pilot is an ingenious and effective mechanism through which the captain carries out his carefully formulated purpose. Similarly Nature is a vast mechanism through which the Mind-Power-Goodness at the heart of things carries out—with no further interference from outside—the purpose It has for the world and for our human race. What this purpose seems to be, and how the mechanical system we call Nature assists in its furtherance, we shall discuss in a later chapter.

The final question provoked by our argument is familiar to all those who have tried to answer the religious queries of young people. If the God we have described is really here, why do men get no direct sense-evidence of His presence? Why are we forced to prove His existence by argument, induction, and labored inference? Why—if He is real—can we not see Him, hear Him, touch Him? The answer to that question lies in the all-too-obvious limitations of our five senses. Our ears, keen as they are, catch only those sound-waves which are moving at a frequency of from 30 to 30,000 times per second. Waves moving either

faster or slower escape our hearing, though apparently some of the animals detect them. Similarly our eyes catch and record as color only those vibrations in the ether (if this is the answer to the riddle of color-perception) which move at the rate of 400 million million to 800 million million times per second. Within that band of vibration normal human eyes detect some 230 distinct tints and shades. But meantime vibrations above the red or below the violet pass us by. Our eyes fail to detect them, just as a tiny camera recording only black and white fails to catch the full splendor of a flaming sunset. The fact no one has ever seen, heard, or touched that Creative Spirit we call God does not prove God does not exist. Rather it is an added indication that our five senses, ingenious and effective though they are, miss part of the many-sided reality by which we are surrounded.

We cannot look beyond  
The spectrum's mystic bar,  
Beyond the violet light  
Yea other lights there are,  
And waves that touch us not,  
Voyaging far.

*What Can We Believe?*

Vast, ordered forces whirl  
Invisible, unfelt,  
Their language less than sound,  
Their names unspelt.  
Suns cannot brighten them  
Nor white heat melt.

Here in the clammy dark  
We dig, as dwarfs for coal,  
Yet One Mind fashioned it  
And us, a luminous whole;  
As lastly thou shalt see,  
Thou, O my soul! \*

\* Florence Wilkinson, in *The Far Country*, p. 107,



## CHAPTER III

### WHY IS THERE SO MUCH SUFFERING?

#### I

IF our world were a thoroughly happy place the argument we have advanced for the presence in it of a Friendly God would undoubtedly convince most people. The difficulty is that our world is not a thoroughly happy place. On the contrary it is permeated, and has always been permeated, with an appalling amount of suffering. Whether we study the record of the subhuman world with its innumerable cruelties, or the record of the human world with its countless tragedies, we find the shadow of disaster everywhere. Consider a question submitted some years ago to Dr. S. Parkes Cadman: "I am a man seventy-four years of age, and I find myself utterly unable to explain the following situations. In 1895 my wife, sick with melancholia, took her own life. In

1901 my eldest son died of a fever. In 1920 my eldest daughter committed suicide during a period of mental depression. In 1924 my only remaining son and his two children were burned to death in their own home. My questions about life can be summed up in one word. Why?" Does not the presence of so much misery in our world disprove everything we have said about a Friendly God? Why, if there is a God who possesses the combination of power and love, does He permit His creatures—animal and human—to suffer so?

As we try to think our way through this age-old question, and understand the new answer the New Protestantism is now offering, it will help us to remember there are three clearly distinguishable types of evil. The first is the evil for which human beings are entirely responsible. The World War may serve as an example. As far as most of us can see, God had nothing to do with the War. Human beings deliberately entered or accidentally stumbled into courses of action which made the War ultimately inevitable. For the miseries which it brought at the time and which it is still bring-

ing in these tragic years of post-war dislocation, human beings are solely responsible. By no turn of argument or twist of logic can the responsibility be placed on God.

The second type of evil is evil for which human beings are partially responsible. One of our contemporary scientists gives these examples. "It is not Nature's fault if men persist in building villages on the flanks of Vesuvius, only to find those villages are later overwhelmed. Neither is Nature responsible if men's careless disposal of fragments of food brings an invasion of rats, and the rats in turn bring the Black Death and destroy in one terrific epidemic a third of the population of England. Many of the evils which afflict the human race are not of Nature's appointing. Rather they are of man's approving."<sup>1</sup> As we let our thought move along this path we begin to realize God is not to blame for the suffering and tragedy which infest so many modern cities. Human beings tolerate slum areas, the slums warp the attitudes and personalities of children, the

<sup>1</sup> See J. Arthur Thomson, *Science and Religion*, p. 221. Charles Scribner's Sons.

children become gangsters and prostitutes, and the gangsters and prostitutes bring tragedy onto the society which created them. For evil of this type God is not to blame. If men did their full duty it would vanish from the Earth.

It is evil of the third type, and the third type alone, which raises the question of God's justice. The third type of evil is evil for which human beings are in no way responsible. So-called "natural disasters"—earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, and the like—belong in this third category. Men do nothing to cause these tragedies, yet year after year they make their appearance. Many smaller and less dramatic disasters are similarly undeserved. Why should so many people in the prime of life fall victim to cancer, tuberculosis, or heart disease? Why should parents who have followed every rule medical science can suggest find themselves with a child who is mentally defective? It is evil of this undeserved and apparently inexplicable type which robs many people of their faith in a Friendly God. Any religious system which hopes to establish itself must have some answer to this puzzle of undeserved suffering.

What is the answer advanced by the New Protestantism?

## II

Perhaps we can best understand the new answer if we contrast it with the answers which have been suggested by successive groups in the past, and which make their belated and disguised appearance in our modern world. The earliest answer to the riddle of undeserved suffering was that tragedies of this type are the work of evil spirits. This idea appears constantly in the Bible, even in the Gospels.<sup>2</sup> It persisted throughout the mediæval era, and emerges in curiously modified form to-day. Whenever we meet individuals who believe there is a Devil, and who are confident that the Devil busied himself—either in ancient or recent times—in plotting men's destruction, we find a remnant of the primitive explanation of undeserved pain.

According to a second and much later theory undeserved disaster represents divine punishment for sin. Those who held this theory maintained

<sup>2</sup> See Mark 7:24-30.

that God deliberately sends evil on those who have done wrong. In the process He sometimes inflicts injury on innocent bystanders, but for this unfortunate damage He must be excused. His aim—and it is a righteous one—is to make sinners suffer, and He must be permitted to carry on His work no matter what happens. Repeatedly this ancient theory emerges in the modern world. When a few years ago the *Titanic* hit an iceberg and sank, a New York minister promptly explained and justified the disaster. According to this preacher, God had been seeking for years to punish a certain multi-millionaire who had an unsavory reputation. When this man took passage on the *Titanic* God recognized His opportunity and made the most of it. That other passengers, all of them innocent, went down in the wreck made no difference. God punished this notorious sinner, and there the matter ended.

The obvious difficulties involved in this second theory led, many centuries ago, to the development of a third theory. According to this third theory undeserved suffering represents divine discipline, a discipline which is kindly and ultimately

beneficial. This third theory appears in many passages in the Bible, and is accepted by many of our contemporaries. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth"<sup>a</sup>—how often these words are quoted as modern men attempt to justify and explain the tragedies which overwhelm innocent human beings! According to this theory God sees that a certain individual needs courage, patience and fortitude, and so He deliberately sends on that individual trials which He thinks will develop these qualities in him. That the trials and sorrows often fail to produce these virtues, and that even more often they destroy other values quite as precious, is usually forgotten. That this theory makes God do wrong in order that right may result is also overlooked. Subjected to careful analysis this third theory is thus quite as inadequate as the two which preceded it in history. What now is the new theory which the New Protestantism puts in place of the older ones?

Consider a familiar human situation. A certain man has a son ten years old. The father's desire

<sup>a</sup> Hebrews 12:6.

is that this boy shall develop into an intelligent, able, kindly man. How can the boy achieve that growth? Only by meeting, mainly on his own resources, the problems and responsibilities forced upon him by life in an exacting place. If the boy is kept at home, resolutely protected from every difficult task and every risky situation, he will never develop. Thus in the course of time the father deliberately sends his son away. During the subsequent years in school and college the boy faces many possibilities of disaster. He may suffer accident, he may overwork, he may involve himself and his parents in personal difficulties, and he may form friendships which will secretly undermine his character. But in spite of these risks the father deliberately exposes his son to the potential dangers of school and college life. Only by so doing can he create in his son the character he desires.

As the years pass, the father also formulates a general plan for the boy's career. Finding that the boy has, for example, certain musical abilities the father begins to prepare him for work in that broad field. He provides singing lessons, and



does everything in his power to stimulate the boy's ambition to make himself a great soloist. Naturally the father makes no effort to direct all the decisions the boy makes. Many of them have no bearing on his purpose for the boy's life, and in these matters he invariably leaves the boy to his own devices. When, however, a situation emerges in which the boy must make a decision of major significance, the father invariably acts. He acts not by overruling the boy's choices but by so influencing the boy's inner attitudes that the boy will tend to make what the father knows is the right move. Thus year by year the father and the boy work together in a highly complex situation, one in which the factors of risk, the father's purpose, and the boy's freedom of action are all clearly recognizable elements.

Suppose now a sudden and unexpected disaster overtakes the boy. Suppose an attack of laryngitis ruins his vocal cords and makes the projected career impossible. Does this mean the father deliberately engineered the disaster? Certainly not. Rather it means there was an unfortunate accident, an accident produced by the element of risk

always present in the situation. Does the fact the boy cannot become a singer mean his father loses all interest in him? Obviously not. Fathers do not act in that way. Blocked in one direction, the father forms a new plan for his son's career, a plan in which whatever abilities the boy still possesses can be used with maximum effectiveness. Now that the boy cannot be a singer, his father begins to prepare him to become a teacher of music, a composer, an orchestral conductor. Thus in a situation crammed with risks, and always holding the possibility that plans must be readjusted to fit swiftly changing circumstance, the father and the son work together to develop character and achieve socially valuable usefulness.

The parallel between this situation and the one in which human beings find themselves here on Earth is plain. God's aim, as far as the New Protestantism can decipher it, is to develop human personalities. In particular it is to create within men and women the priceless qualities of intelligence, skill, and kindness. With this end in view our world was deliberately planned and slowly brought into being. What type of a world did it

have to be if, unaided by miraculous interferences from outside, it would tend to develop these traits? It had to be a world with rigid and unwavering laws, a world in which human beings had a measure of control over their own actions, and a world in which people would be forced to live and work with each other. Only a world of this type could make human beings grow in intelligence, skill, and kindness. But such a world was inevitably crammed with risks. Its rigid laws were sure to bring suffering when coincidence turned them in the wrong rather than the right direction. Its free-will meant that men might use their powers for cruel rather than kindly ends. Its social contacts meant that suffering could spread quite as readily as joy. Such tragic elements should be eliminated from life? But how could they be eliminated if life is to be an adequate training school for character?

It is in this complex and risky world we now find ourselves. Undeserved suffering emerges everywhere about us and yet, as history shows clearly, this world of ours is admirably fitted to develop human character. Out of animal forms

unable to think clearly, achieve greatly, or sympathize widely have come human forms which reveal ever-growing capacities in all three lines. History is the record of that significant advance. Granted the advance has been paralleled by immense suffering. Could God and men have had the first without facing the possibility of the second?

### III

As each person faces life God has, so the New Protestantism believes, a general purpose for his career. We might define that purpose more closely by saying that God seeks to create in each of us the three qualities of character we have been discussing, and seeks to use each of us in the wider task of developing those qualities in others. Obviously each one of us possesses the ability to make his own choices, and obviously in most of the decisions of daily life we are left to follow our own devices. But in the major choices of our career, the choices that affect our ultimate destiny, God acts. He acts not by overruling our free-will but by bringing before our attention ideas and

ideals which may, and He hopes will, affect our decisions. Through memory, through conscience, through the association of ideas, through the focussing of attention on a certain ideal at a certain moment of crisis, God seeks to give us His guidance. Suppose in this complex situation an accidental combination of circumstances brings disaster upon us. What should our attitude be?

We should take, so the New Protestantism maintains, the same attitude we want our own children to take when misfortunes arise in their lives. The tragedies that befall us are not of God's manufacture. They represent the risks which He and we must run in a world designed to produce character and therefore crammed with possibilities of pain. Our misfortunes are as much of a sorrow to God as they are to us. Yet how could God take us out of this dangerous world without surrendering at the same time the possibility of developing our character? How could He interfere in the world-process for our benefit without interrupting the growth of character in us and in numberless individuals about us? If the accident which has overwhelmed us

destroys part of our powers, we can and we must trust God to find some new use for our life, a use which will employ the abilities we still retain. We human parents thus aid our children. Have we not the right to expect that God will show an equal love and loyalty toward us?

The attitude thus revealed by one who holds the new belief is radically different from the attitude disclosed by many of the Protestants of the past. We to-day do not believe that everything that happens is the will of God. We are convinced that many of the things which happen are not the will of God, but accidental and tragic frustrations of His desire. Neither do we say, when a disaster comes, that God deliberately sent it. We cannot believe that a loving God would send it as punishment, nor can we believe that an intelligent God would send it as discipline. We realize that so-called divine punishments have usually brought immense suffering on innocent people, and that so-called divine disciplines have usually done quite as much harm as good. We believe that the tragedies in life are the result of the inevitable element of risk connected with, and

inherent in, a world designed to build character. When therefore we are obliged to face our share of the world's accidents we do this with a brave heart and an undismayed mind. We know that the sorry situation is as tragic in God's sight as it is in ours, that His love and hope still surround our tiny, broken life, and that He can be trusted to find some new use for whatever powers we still possess. Here is an attitude toward the tragedies of life which is basically different from the attitude inculcated by the religious systems of the past. Many of us are convinced it is far more rational, and many of us know from personal experience it is far more helpful.

Suppose the tragedy which accident thus brings upon a man snuffs out his life. Suppose the development of intelligence, skill, and kindness which God purposed for him is left obviously incomplete. What then? Does Death mark the end of the growth of his personality? A discussion of the riddle of undeserved suffering thus leads inevitably into a discussion of the deeper riddle of Death. To that further phase of our problem we now turn.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE NEW CONCEPTION OF IMMORTALITY

#### I

THERE are two forms of immortality which are fairly obvious and in which everyone believes. The first is the immortality an individual achieves through his descendants. If a man has children, and they in turn have children, and this process of having children continues indefinitely, the founder of the family clearly wins a certain victory over death and extinction. He survives in and through his descendants, as an oak tree survives in the oaks which grow out of the acorns it produces, or as this year's Easter lilies will survive in next year's crop. Obviously the original oak disappears, and obviously this year's Easter lilies will themselves vanish within a few weeks. But oaks and lilies of the same species eventually reappear, and in this restricted sense the original



oak and the original lilies survive. This is the type of immortality we find in the realm of Nature, and without analyzing it carefully many people hail it as a proof that human beings will survive the change of death. Such people fail to notice that this biological survival applies only to the living forms which leave an unbroken line of descendants, and that even in this case it grants immortality only to the species while it ruthlessly destroys, generation after generation, each successive representative of the species.

The other type of immortality in which everyone believes is the immortality we achieve through our influence on others. In the case of prominent individuals this survival of influence is an obvious and significant thing. Abraham Lincoln, for example, has left on American life and institutions an indelible mark. As long as America endures, her citizens will recall Lincoln and his work, and feel the influence of his convictions and the courses of action he initiated. In the case of less prominent individuals this type of survival is of course less impressive. Ordinary men and women are remembered only for a time, and then

what influence they exert becomes an indistinguishable part of the tradition of their family, their community, and their nation. In this vague and intangible way they too can be said to survive. Many of our contemporaries, noting this fact of the persistence of influence, eagerly proclaim it as the immortality in which all of us can and should believe. They tell us a man lives permanently in the memories he leaves behind, in the institutions he helps to build, and in the forces he sets in motion in human life. Such people fail to note that only a few important individuals succeed in making a deep and lasting impression on humanity, and that even in the case of such individuals this theory says nothing about the fate of the person who started the influence. To put the matter simply, what has now happened to Abraham Lincoln himself? Granted that he set in motion forces which still affect the life of our nation, still make him a real figure in American life. Is Lincoln himself still existent somewhere—the self-conscious, individualized, creative personality he was two generations ago? There is the real question at issue in the debate over immortality.

The familiar statements that we live in our descendants and in the influences we exert on others leave that essential question unanswered.

The earlier forms of Christianity answered this question in direct and unambiguous fashion. Primitive Christianity taught that Jesus had risen from the grave in actual, physical form; that Christians had been mystically united with him through baptism and the Lord's Supper; and that because he had survived death and Christians were bound to him they too would enjoy an actual, physical resurrection.<sup>1</sup> Catholic Christianity, basing its teaching on the divinely inspired Bible as interpreted by the divinely inspired Church, also taught—and still teaches—the doctrine of the resurrection of the body.<sup>2</sup> Early Protestantism, employing the Bible as its source of authority, continued to insist that through some miraculous act on the part of God all those who had lived would eventually rise from the grave and on the Judgment Day be sentenced to eternal

<sup>1</sup> Romans 6:3-5.

<sup>2</sup> See J. F. Sullivan, *The Fundamentals of Catholic Belief*, p. 276. P. J. Kennedy & Sons.

doom or granted the reward of eternal life.\* When the New Protestantism abandons the ancient authorities and seeks to build its teaching solely on the foundation of experience and reason what can it say about individual survival after death? Or can it, in the final analysis, say nothing?

## II

If we are to understand the new conception of immortality taught by many—not all—liberal Protestants, we must first understand the theory of human life out of which it grows. What is the relationship between the body and the personality? Clearly a living man possesses both these things. He has a body which is immediately apparent to everyone about him, and also a strange and intangible thing we vaguely call his spirit, life, soul, or personality. If he suddenly drops dead his body still remains, but this second reality seems to vanish. What is this personality? What is the relationship between it and the body with which it is—in some curious way—connected?

There are two entirely different answers to the

\* See *The Westminster Confession*, Chaps. 32 and 33.

riddle of the body-personality relationship. Some people think the personality is the product of the mechanisms contained within the body and the brain. When those mechanisms operate normally they produce the thing we call a personality, just as the many interrelated parts of a dynamo generate an electric current. Consider the experience of a normal child. For the first few days or weeks of an infant's life there are few evidences in the baby of a personality. The body-brain mechanism is not yet running smoothly enough or powerfully enough to create it. Eventually, as the mechanism adjusts itself and gains momentum, the spark of personality flickers into being. When the child drops to sleep or suffers a serious illness that spark vanishes again. The mechanism slows down and the current fades out. Death? Death marks the break-up of the body-brain mechanism, and this disintegration means the inevitable disappearance of the personality which that mechanism created. How, once a certain dynamo has been broken to pieces, can the particular electric current it once produced be brought into existence again?

But there is a second theory of the body-per-

sonality relationship which many liberal Protestants now hold, and on which a belief in the survival of individual personality after death can be based. According to this second theory the personality is not the product of the body-brain mechanism. Rather it is an antecedent and independent reality which functions through that mechanism. The radio suggests an analogy. When a speaker broadcasts an address his words, traveling in the form of invisible vibrations, encounter here and there ingenious mechanisms called receiving sets. Meeting those mechanisms, the speaker's words instantly emerge into audibility. The receiving sets do not of course create the message. Rather they are a mechanical means through which words, created elsewhere, achieve expression. If the receiving sets are well constructed and perfectly tuned the speaker's words "come through" with surprising clearness. If, on the other hand, the receiving sets are poorly built, inaccurately adjusted, and imperfectly energized, the speaker's words—however perfectly enunciated at first—come through in distorted and indistinct fashion. This of course is not the fault

of the man who is broadcasting. Rather it is the fault of the receiving sets through which his words gain audibility.

The theory of the body-personality relationship suggested by this illustration is obvious. It says that human personalities are independent entities created by God and enjoying a literally endless existence. Here in our world of Time, Space, and Matter they emerge in and through the familiar mechanisms of body and brain, mechanisms created by the blind biological process. Sometimes that process, operating in ways modern science has now made thoroughly familiar, succeeds in producing a body and a brain which are—to revert to our radio analogy—perfectly built, tuned, and energized. Under such circumstances the divinely created personality operating through that mechanism gains a thoroughly normal and adequate expression. In other instances, happily a minority, the body-brain mechanism produced by the biological process is distinctly defective. A congenital idiot may serve as an example. In such a case the indwelling personality can gain no normal or complete expression because the body-

brain mechanism through which it seeks to express itself is hopelessly inadequate. What does Death mean? Death means, according to this theory, only the breakdown of the physical mechanism through which an eternal and essentially indestructible personality has been functioning temporarily. Suppose, half way through a certain broadcast, the receiving set through which a message is coming collapses. This accident does not mean that the message itself necessarily ends. All it means is that the transmissive device through which the message was gaining audibility has given way. If we tune in promptly with another receiving set the message will come through again, beginning exactly where it left off a moment before.

If we picture the relationship between the body and the personality in terms of a dynamo and its attendant current, a survival of personality after the disaster of Death seems essentially incredible. But if we picture that relationship in terms of a radio set and its attendant message, the survival of personality seems not only possible but probable. If human personalities do have the su-



preme value which they seem to possess, and if our existence here is a carefully planned opportunity for their emergence and development, does it not seem likely that those personalities have been so created that they are—like matter and energy—essentially indestructible?

### III

Suppose we conceive of personalities in this second way, and picture immortality as the survival and continued development of every personality after the relatively unimportant incident of physical dissolution called Death. What are the different forms that immortality might assume?

The doctrine of reincarnation asserts that when personalities survive Death they enter and thereafter function through any one of several possible mechanisms. Thus a certain human personality may reëmerge in a succeeding existence in a man, a woman, or even an animal. Life and growth continue, but in the process of reincarnation the personality loses practically all the marks of individuality which it acquired during the preceding phase of its existence. We say "practically all."

Believers in reincarnation claim that the curious fancies which flash into our minds on certain occasions, fancies which make us exclaim we have seen a certain person or visited a certain locality some time previously, are flashes of memory from an earlier existence. Similarly, according to believers in reincarnation, genius represents the accumulated gains of a personality in one field of expression, gains recorded through many previous existences. How better can we explain the phenomenal literary power of Shakespeare than to say his personality had, through centuries of existence and development, gained an ever-enlarging ability in one particular field? <sup>4</sup>

The doctrine of conditional immortality draws an entirely different picture. It says that only a portion of the personalities we meet in this life gain survival in another world.<sup>5</sup> Just as there is a steady and a relentless sifting process which gives survival in this existence only to those physical forms which prove fit to survive, so in the realm of personality there is an analogous process which

<sup>4</sup> See Annie Besant, *The Riddle of Life*. Theosophical Press.

<sup>5</sup> See J. Y. Simpson, *Man and the Attainment of Immortality*. Harper Brothers.

relentlessly eliminates the less-fit selves and grants the boon of survival in the existence to come only to the more-fit. According to this theory personal immortality may be attained, but only a certain proportion of personalities attain it. What the conditions of personality-survival are no one can say, and to this extent the theory leaves us in blank confusion. But the theory does avoid the difficulties so often raised against the theory that every personality, irrespective of its quality, survives. Those objections are usually stated in some such form as this—"If every personality survives and develops, where is there room for all the personalities which must, by this time, be in existence?"

The belief which many liberal Protestants now hold differs sharply from the two beliefs we have just discussed. According to this third belief, every human personality—whatever its apparent quality may be—survives the change called Death, and continues its growth and development in a further existence or successive existences after Death. That growth and development begin after Death at the precise point where they stopped be-

fore Death. There are no gaps or miraculous changes. Just as, for most of us, life will begin to-morrow morning exactly where it leaves off to-night, so life will begin the moment after Death exactly where it left off the moment before Death. If in this existence we gain a better-than-average intelligence, skill and kindness, that better-than-average equipment will be ours as we face the further existence waiting for us—and for everyone—beyond the relatively insignificant experience of dying. If, on the other hand, we fail to grow in character during this phase of our endless evolution, then when we enter the second phase of that evolution (assuming that the present phase is the first) we shall find ourselves proportionately handicapped. Of the conditions of the next stage of our growth we know literally nothing. Where it is, what it is like, whether it discloses physical or nonphysical forms, how and how closely it is connected with the present stage of our growth—on these points we are (unless we accept the information offered by Spiritualism) in complete ignorance. But do we need to know these details of the life to come? Is it not

enough to have the assurance that there is such a life, and that in it the gains of personality which we make here will be preserved?

## IV

Against this background we can see in clear outline the new interpretation of life which the New Protestantism makes, and which we have been developing point by point in this chapter and the preceding one. That interpretation might be summarized in some such statement as this: "The purpose of life is, we believe, the development of personalities characterized by ever-growing intelligence, skill, and kindness. In order to assure this development God planned a particular type of world, and then through an evolutionary process covering millions of years gradually brought that world into being. It is in this world, a world deliberately designed to produce character, that we find ourselves to-day. The tragedies it discloses represent the element of risk inevitably involved in a world so constructed that it will force the development of character. In response to the steady pressure of life itself our

race is thus growing wiser, abler, and kinder as the centuries pass. This gain of the race is paralleled by a corresponding gain of the individual. Under normal circumstances each human being makes during his lifetime an obvious advance toward the three great goals of intelligence, skill, and kindness. When the familiar body-brain mechanism finally breaks down in Death, the divinely created and eternal personality within continues its growth and development in a further phase of existence. Thus the race as a whole moves forward along the horizontal line we call history, while each human personality moves upward along the vertical line we call the growth of character. For the race and for the individual the ultimate goal is the same—the development of intelligence, skill, and kindness. Reason, purpose, and unfailing love undergird the entire process—the reason, purpose, and love of the God within Whose vaster life we live and move and have our being.”

On what grounds do we base this interpretation of life and destiny? It is, many of us believe, a logical induction from four significant facts of

experience and reason. They can be stated plainly and briefly, though each might be discussed at great length and with bewildering detail.

To begin with, the world in which we find ourselves seems an essentially reasonable place. In spite of innumerable accidents and tragedies the movement of life-as-a-whole seems to be in a fairly consistent direction and toward a fairly obvious goal. Furthermore when we study our world and the life-process taking place about us, the intelligence within our own mind seems to encounter a corresponding intelligence in the total scheme of things. It is this fact which permits scientific investigation, and makes history the record of intelligible patterns rather than a congeries of incomprehensible happenings. What conclusion can we draw from the reasonableness of the world? Can we not infer that a consistent purpose underlies the life-process, and that the gains achieved by that process will be preserved?

Again, we find that the human beings who have been called into existence by the life-process reveal unique and highly impressive values. When all is said that can be said about the smallness,

the weakness, and the apparent temporariness of individuals, something must still be added about the impressive powers those same individuals disclose. Human beings can think, create, appreciate moral and æsthetic values, and—in response to the tug of a distant ideal—gradually call into being a finer life for themselves and their fellows. Around these unique powers and the resultant unique value of human beings our entire civilization is built. What conclusion can we draw from the combined facts of a reasonable world and uniquely valuable people emerging upon it? Can we not infer that such a world would have a purpose for those people, give them some sort of permanent survival rather than destroy them relentlessly, generation after generation?

The third fact supporting our theory is this. Wherever we look in the world we find an impressive growth-process which goes on steadily and endlessly. One development leads to another, one living form calls another into being, one phase of evolution merely prepares the way for a succeeding phase. The ancient picture of a static and unchanging world has now given place to the en-



tirely new picture of a world tremulous with inevitable, incessant, and endless change. If growth is the fundamental law of life what conclusion can we draw from this fact? Can we not infer that the law of growth applies to human personalities as well as to everything else, that the purpose of the world for the uniquely valuable human creatures which have emerged upon it is to give them a chance to grow, and that this growth—once begun—will last forever?

But to a Christian the fourth fact in the series is the most impressive of all. We are convinced that a God of wisdom, power, and love is forever at work in our world. What conclusion can we draw from the quality of His character? A God of love would not call us into being, permit us to start our development, give us a glimpse of greater possibilities, and then ruthlessly terminate our growth. A God of wisdom would not make the present stage of our evolution as reasonable and purposeful as it seems to be, and then conclude that stage with the bewildering irrationality of permanent extinction. A God of power would give—somehow and somewhere—the boon

of survival and endless growth to the human creatures who crave it so deeply. The character of God is thus our surest ground for faith in the immortality of every human soul. It is from this final fact, even more than from the three which precede it, that we draw the induction that human life has significant meaning and purpose, that we are in a world deliberately designed to make us all grow in character, and that once this growth begins it will continue until each human personality finally attains the perfection which a Fatherly God would inevitably desire.

O yet we trust that somehow good  
Will be the final goal of ill,  
To pangs of Nature, sins of will,  
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;  
  
That nothing walks with aimless feet,  
That not one life shall be destroyed  
Or cast as rubbish to the void  
When God hath made the pile complete! \*

In those familiar lines Tennyson anticipated the teaching of the New Protestantism.

\* Alfred Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, Stanza LIV.

## CHAPTER V

### WHAT SHOULD WE PRAY FOR?

#### I

FOR many centuries Christians believed it was proper to pray for anything. The early apostles and their converts prayed that their friends might be released from prison, that the sick might be miraculously healed, and that the existing world-order might speedily come to an end. Mediæval Christians prayed that they might be preserved from famine, pestilence, and sudden death, and that the Turks might be prevented from invading Europe. The Christians of only a century ago felt no hesitation in praying for changes in the weather. Ralph Waldo Emerson has recorded an incident which suggests clearly the prevailing point of view in the early nineteenth century. A minister of Sudbury, "being present at the Thursday lecture in Boston, heard the officiating clergyman pray for rain. As soon as the service was over, he went to the petitioner and said, 'You Bos-

ton ministers, as soon as the tulip wilts under your windows, go to church and pray for rain until all Concord and Sudbury are under water.' ”<sup>1</sup> Notice that this man's objection to the prayer for rain was not that the prayer might be unanswered. His objection was that the prayer might be answered so effectually that his community would be flooded.

But in recent years discriminating people have begun to question this traditional attitude and practice. There are two main reasons for their skepticism. The first is that modern science has given us an entirely new picture of the world in which we live. We now realize that our world is not an erratic place in which divine interventions are constantly taking place, and literally anything may happen. Rather our world is an orderly place in which the processes of Nature continue steadily and relentlessly on their consistent way. In such a world how can intelligent people pray for changes in the weather, or for a sudden termination of the entire world-process? And while

<sup>1</sup> See Emerson, *Lectures and Biographical Sketches*, p. 363. Houghton, Mifflin Company.

modern science has thus been drawing a new picture of the world, modern religion has been drawing a new picture of God. We no longer think of Him as a glorified human being who, in response to the pleas of earthly admirers, occasionally indulges in an exhibition of miraculous power. Rather we think of Him as a Vast Mind and Power and Goodness permeating our entire universe and forever seeking to develop in human beings the priceless qualities of intelligence, skill, and kindness. For that end our world was called into being, and the particular life-pattern we find here was established. How could such a God, fulfilling these long-range plans, be expected to interfere in the operations of the world-process for the benefit of hard-pressed individuals? Thoughts like these underlie the prevailing skepticism about the efficacy of prayer. Convictions like these have quietly but relentlessly overthrown the once common practice of asking God to change the weather, arrest a pestilence, or save distant communities from starvation.

Face to face with these new difficulties some of our contemporaries suggest that we drop from

prayer all element of petition. Prayer is, these people tell us, the act by which men commune with God, reestablish their sense of His reality and nearness. The answer to prayer, these people affirm, is nothing more nor less than a new consciousness of God's presence. When that consciousness dawns our prayers have been answered, and we should rise from our knees prepared to take quietly and bravely whatever comes. This is the point of view we find in much current religious poetry. Consider, for example, the implications of this verse:

I almost never say my prayers  
With smoothly folded eyes,  
So many prayers go blundering  
Each day to Paradise.

I think that God must tire so  
Of prayers all neat and trim,  
When rows and rows of them each day  
March stiffly up to Him.

And so I wait till some cool dawn  
When God goes down our walk,  
And then I run and slip my hand  
Within His hand, and talk.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Ellinor L. Norcross, in *Quotable Poems*, Vol. II, p. 317, compiled by T. C. Clark. Willett, Clark & Co. Reprinted from *The Christian Century*.

There is prayer minus petition, the prayer which seeks only to establish the comforting sense of God's reality and nearness.

But some of us cannot thus abandon the element of petition. We know that in moments of need human beings instinctively and inevitably ask God for help. What type of help should they seek? Is there any evidence that their cry is answered?

## II

There are three facts about prayer around which the New Protestantism is gradually building a new theory of prayer and a new technique of praying. The first is familiar to all thoughtful people. God does not, and apparently will not, interfere in the processes of Nature, no matter how earnestly human beings urge Him to do so. This fact has been demonstrated by centuries of experience, and is now generally accepted by discriminating people. The second fact is less obvious but quite as significant. God does not, and apparently will not, change one human being at the solicitation of another, no matter how beneficial the proposed change might be. This fact too

rests on the evidence of long and painful experience. Parents cannot pray wisdom into the minds of their children, eager though they may be to do so. Church members cannot pray honesty into the hearts of corrupt public officials, beneficial though the change might be. This basic fact is now accepted by thoughtful people everywhere. It accounts for the difference between the public prayers made by the ministers of our time, and the prayers made by their predecessors centuries ago.

These two facts, considered alone, might lead us to conclude that prayer is essentially ineffective. The third fact we mention shows not only that some prayers have significant results but also indicates what prayers have those results. We now realize that during the act of prayer God can change, and does change, the inner life of the individual who prays. The evidence supporting this fact is quite as extensive and impressive as the evidence supporting the two facts we have just mentioned. Literally millions of people, representing all races, creeds, and stages of development, have discovered that while they pray an



inward and spiritual help almost invariably comes to them. Though their outward situation remains the same, and though the people about them give no evidence of a change, they themselves are inwardly renewed.

An experience reported by a graduate student at one of our American universities may serve as an illustration. "I had been separated from my wife and children for more than a year. I felt I must continue my studies, but naturally I wanted to have my family with me. This could be accomplished only in case I could find a particular type of part-time work. I received a tentative offer of a position, applied for it, made a poor impression on my prospective employer, and at the end of a particularly exhausting day was told that I could not have the place. I shall never forget the long ride home that night. I finally got to bed about two in the morning, but I was too tired to sleep. The next day I tried to go on with my work, but in the afternoon I gave up and came home to have things out with myself. I spent about four hours quite alone in my room, sometimes praying and sometimes just thinking. What happened? Grad-

ually the almost unendurable pain which had possessed me faded, and a great gladness and courage filled my heart. I began to feel that I could go ahead, do my best, and take what came. There were no evidences of hysteria or hallucination in the experience. My mental anguish quietly vanished, and peace and courage took its place. Best of all, they stayed with me permanently.” \* How do we interpret such an experience? We believe that the act of prayer quieted this tired and distracted man. As his mental and emotional balance was restored, the Divine Spirit which surrounds us all changed his inner life. It did so by bringing new ideas into the focus of his thought. Through those new ideas it released his own reserves of surplus power. This is the answer to prayer—a change within the life of the man who prays. This is the thing to pray for—a renewal of one’s own inner life. Around this theory the New Protestantism is now building a convincing account of prayer and a permanently helpful technique of praying.

\* Condensed from H. N. Wieman, *Religious Experience and Scientific Method*, p. 225. By permission of the Macmillan Company, publishers.

## III

Suppose a person recognizes the logic of this new belief, and accepts the belief as presumably true. He will, obviously, no longer pray for changes in the external world or changes in other human beings. What changes in himself will he seek through prayer?

He will certainly pray for new wisdom, wisdom which will enable him to understand more clearly the problems life thrusts upon him. This is the prayer which numberless people are now making, making not only every day but every hour. What happens as they thus ask for new wisdom? God brings old and half-forgotten ideas back into the center of their attention, or makes new ideas—that is, new combinations of old elements of experience—rise in starlike loveliness before the waiting mind. Wisdom is thus given them, given by an External Power working through normal mental processes and in accordance with the well-recognized laws of mental action. Professor Pratt of Williams College gives an interesting example. "I recently learned of a man who, in the midst of a grave political crisis, prayed for wis-

dom. He had come to a time when his mind, exhausted by toil and worry, refused to work any longer. In the moments of calm which followed his prayer there came into his mind the idea for a course of action which, as subsequent events showed, was the right one. Had he not had recourse to some such mental sedative as the act of prayer he might never have gained that idea. Furthermore the religious element involved in praying had a definite connection with the answer he received. It was his confidence in a Greater Power and his voluntary committal of himself to that Power which dispersed his weariness and his worry, and made it possible for him to gain the inner illumination he sought.”<sup>4</sup>

A man will also pray for new moral strength, strength which will enable him to live steadily on his own best level. As we face the difficulties and temptations of daily life most of us do not need new ideals. We already know what use we should make of our opportunities, what qualities of character we should reveal day by day. The thing we

<sup>4</sup> Condensed from J. B. Pratt, *The Religious Consciousness*, p. 331 note. By permission of the Macmillan Company.

need is new moral strength, strength which will enable us to live as we know we should. Many of us pray for that strength, pray for it as each new crisis comes upon us. What happens? God brings before our mind the ideals, the memories, the ambitions which rouse our courage, stiffen our determination, and release our latent energies of will-power. Strength is thus given us, strength which turns our threatened defeat into victory.

Across the fields of long ago  
There often comes to me  
A little lad with face aglow,  
The boy I used to be.  
He watches, listens, takes my hand,  
And walks awhile with me,  
Then asks me if I've made myself  
The man I planned to be.

Why are those lines so moving? Because they describe one of the commonest of our experiences—the experience of recalling an old ambition and finding it stimulates us to renewed moral endeavor. It is through such familiar mechanisms of the mind that God gives us the new strength we seek.

Most of all, a man to-day will pray for new quietness of spirit, the inward poise which will enable him to face quietly the hardships and tragedies which life thrusts upon him. Given this quietness of mind most people can manage circumstance and—what is often harder—manage themselves. A quiet mind thinks swiftly and accurately, maintains a true perspective on people and situations, and permits the emergence within the self of the normal supply of courage, resourcefulness, and endurance. It retains the saving thought of friends who can be counted upon, of an inner strength which will never fail, of a God within Whose love and power we spend our years. For such a poised mind multitudes of people pray, and to them day after day the inner quietness they seek is given. It is given as God wakens within them the thoughts—old or new—which reestablish perspective, rouse confidence, and allay fear. A recent biography gives this example. "All three of us were awakened in the night by a sharp cry of pain. We rushed into father's room and found him standing there erect, his hands clenched in his dark hair. His eyes were full of

misery and amazement, and his face was white as that of the dead. He frightened us. He saw this, or else his intense will mastered his agony, for he took his hands quietly from his head and then said slowly and gently, 'Let us pray.' Then he turned to a little sofa in the room. There lay our mother, dead." <sup>5</sup>

## IV

This new theory of prayer and its answer inevitably raises two questions. The first is obvious. If we should pray only for changes within ourselves, and if the answer to our prayer is the emergence of new resources within ourselves, should we not abandon the familiar practice of praying for other people and for causes outside our own life? The answer to that question will be evident if we examine the implications of the three types of prayers just mentioned. We can and we should pray for other people and for causes outside our own life provided our prayer concludes with the petition that we ourselves may gain the wisdom, the strength, and the quietness

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by H. S. Coffin in *What Is There in Religion?* p. 48. By permission of the Macmillan Company.

of mind which will enable us to meet the needs of those other people and those outside causes. There is a significant difference between praying for our friends by asking God to help them, and praying for our friends by asking God to give us the new insight, the new sympathy, the new tact, and the new unselfishness which will make us ourselves able to help them. Experience shows clearly that prayers of the first type usually remain unanswered, while prayers of the second type have an immediate and an inevitable answer. There is an equally important difference between praying that the world may find the way out of its difficulties, and praying that we ourselves may gain enough wisdom, strength, and quietness of mind to understand our little part of the world's problem, and enough heroism of spirit to resolve to solve it. Unselfishness in prayer is as important as unselfishness in daily life. But our prayers for other people must be prayers which can be answered through us and not through magical manipulations of external situations.

The other question raised by the new theory of prayer is less apparent and far more puzzling.



Granted that during the act of prayer the inner life of the man who prays is changed. Do the new wisdom, the new strength, the new quietness of mind come from an Outside Source, or are they merely the product of the man's own faculties now stimulated into new activity? In other words, does the answer to prayer come from God or come from the suppliant himself?

Suppose we confess frankly that on this point there is to-day, and presumably there will be for many decades to come, a sharp difference of opinion. Suppose we admit further that it is impossible to demonstrate whether the processes which psychology can now trace within the mind are set in motion by an external or an internal agency. We still have, so it seems to some of us, ample grounds for interpreting the results of prayer as an answer sent by God rather than a mere reaction of our own psycho-physical mechanism. Our study of the world in which we live convinces us that a Mind, a Power, and a Goodness greater than our own are at work here. Our study of life and history impels us to believe that this Divine Spirit is interested in each one of

us and eager to help us. As we ponder the problem of prayer it seems reasonable to conclude that during the act of prayer the help God gives might well come. As we ourselves pray, and as multitudes of other people pray, an indubitable help does come. Have we not the right to combine these facts of reason and experience, and draw from them the induction that during the act of prayer we open our little life to the Greater Life within which we dwell, and that the all-encompassing God then sets in motion those secret mechanisms of our own mind which release for our benefit our own reserves of power? This at any rate is the conclusion to which the New Protestantism has come.

## CHAPTER VI

### CAN WE STILL BELIEVE IN GOD'S CARE?

#### I

Two generations ago a boy named Maxwell Cornelius was born on a farm in Pennsylvania. His life proved to be a strange succession of misfortunes. As a young man he located in Pittsburgh and attempted to establish himself there as a contractor and builder. But during the construction of one of his first houses his leg was so badly injured in an accident that amputation was necessary. Crippled for life, he determined to gain a college education and enter one of the professions. There, he figured, his physical handicap would be less disastrous than it would in either business or engineering. After finishing his college course he entered the ministry and accepted a call to a church in Altoona, Pennsylvania. But there a second misfortune overtook him. His wife's health broke down, and he was

obliged to take her to California and settle permanently there. He located a pastorate in Pasadena, but there disaster met him again. Just after he had succeeded in completing the erection of a new edifice for his church, local business difficulties made most of the pledges he had secured worthless. Years of further effort were required before he could free the church from debt. When this work was finally completed he met the major disaster of his life. His wife's health gave way again, and after a brief illness she died. Dr. Cornelius insisted on conducting her funeral service himself, and in the course of the service read a poem he had written a short time before. The words were later set to music, and became one of the favorite hymns of the 1890's.

Not now but in the coming years,  
It may be in the better land,  
We'll read the meaning of our tears  
And there—some time—we'll understand.

Why what we long for most of all  
Eludes so oft our eager hand,  
Why hopes are crushed, why castles fall,  
Up there—some time—we'll understand.

God knows the way, God holds the key,  
God guides us with unerring hand,  
With tearless eyes at last we'll see,  
And there—some time—we'll understand.

This faith in God's detailed guidance and unfailing care characterized the Protestantism of a generation ago. Can we still hold these comforting beliefs? Can we still retain them even in part?

Most of us who believe in God at all have little difficulty in believing that He has a purpose for humanity as a whole. From a hundred facts we draw the induction that our Earth was so designed and constructed that organic life could emerge upon its surface, and that the evolving forms of life could finally flower into human beings capable of intelligent thought and kindly action. We are also convinced that the human race as a whole has been making slow but fairly consistent gains in intelligence, skill, and kindness. The evidence of science and the evidence of history thus lead us to conclude that a coherent purpose undergirds our world, and that our race as a whole has been moving along a definite road toward a far-off, divinely envisaged goal. But

what about individual lives? Can we to-day, knowing what we do about the brevity and the tragedy of individual careers, still believe that God guides and cares for each one of us? Or is this central belief in historic Christianity one of the beliefs which must be either abandoned completely or retained solely by the exercise of blind faith?

## II

There are several facts which have helped some of us greatly as we have tried to think our way through this puzzling problem. To begin with, it seems plain that there are, operating in our world to-day, many forces beside the Great Force we call God. Consider this situation. A criminal has just completed a robbery and is trying to escape from the scene of his crime. As he drives away in his car rain begins to fall, and a cold wind from the north freezes the raindrops as they strike the pavement. Within a few moments the street along which he is driving is covered with a film of ice. Suddenly one of the tires in his car, weakened by years of strain, blows out.

The car skids madly across the ice-covered pavement, and in its helter-skelter movements strikes another car in which several children are riding. Both cars are wrecked and one of the children is instantly killed. How many forces are at work in that complex situation? Even to begin enumerating them is bewildering. The criminal's determination to escape, the chance combination of the rain and the cold wind, the relentless formation of ice on the pavement, the sudden breaking of the rotted fabric within the tire, the erratic movements of the skidding car, the accidental presence of the other car at a particular spot at a particular instant—all these factors entered into the situation which eventually brought death to an innocent child. Why are there so many tragedies in our world? Not because God deliberately engineers them. Not because He is indifferent to individuals. Rather because, for reasons which we are at last beginning to understand, He created a world in which many forces are in constant operation. Time and again those forces combine accidentally, as they did in the situation we just described, to create tragedy.

How, in such a complex situation, can we picture God's guidance of individual lives? Many of us have been compelled to abandon the ancient belief in predestination, and the allied belief that whatever happens is God's will. It is this allied belief which appears clearly in the poem we quoted at the beginning of this chapter. We question these earlier beliefs because they seem to us to rest on an oversimplified view of life—the view which regards God as the only force operating in our world. Believing to-day that many forces are in operation here, we are compelled to picture God's guidance in a new way. Perhaps this illustration will suggest what that way is. Through a broad channel the tide is moving slowly, quietly, and steadily. A strong wind, blowing in the opposite direction, pushes the waves directly against the ongoing movement of the tide. Strange eddies and currents, set in motion by the configuration of the shore and the sea-bottom, confuse still further the waters in that channel. Meantime steamers, plowing through the channel, add still another element of confusion to the complex water-movements there.



Yet all the time the tide moves, silently and steadily, in one consistent direction. When these superficial and relatively unimportant forces lose their temporary power, the tide will assume undisputed control of every drop of water in that channel. You and I live in a world as complex and confused as that stretch of water. At any moment one of the superficial powers operating here may seize our little life and sweep it in a false or even fatal direction. But all the time, far below the surface of things, moves the vast tide of God's purpose, God's power, and God's love. However violent the superficial confusion of life, to whatever disastrous places the storms of circumstance may bring us temporarily, in the end—here or in that other part of the channel we shall enter after Death—the tide of God's purpose can be trusted to carry us where God wants us to be. "Underneath thee are the Everlasting Arms."<sup>1</sup> For the New Protestantism as well as the Old those words have profound meaning. They speak to us of a divine guidance and a divine care which, though not always effective at

<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 33:27.

the moment, are ultimately the surest and the most consoling elements in human experience.

### III

Another fact which has helped many of us solve the problem of divine providence is this. God may influence only a few of our major choices and still direct the course of our entire career. Or to put the matter differently, He may leave us most of the time to our own devices and still—by influencing the decisions we make at crucial moments—bring us ultimately where He wants us to be. Consider this analogy. A doctor hopes his son will follow him in a certain highly specialized field of medical work. He understands the boy's inheritance and abilities, and he realizes that the boy will probably find greater opportunities and more permanent satisfactions in this career than in any other. How does the father guide his boy toward this particular life-work? He makes of course no attempt to influence all the choices the boy makes. On no occasion does he force the boy's decision. To do either of those things would be, he realizes, to

rob his son of one of the most valuable disciplines in human experience—the discipline of making one's own decisions and then accepting for good or for ill all the consequences. But whenever the boy reaches an important crossroad his father invariably acts. He acts not by overruling the boy's decisions but by guiding and influencing them. When, in his teens, the boy must decide whether he will remain in school or drop out, his father does all he can to impel (not compel) the boy to finish school and go on to college. When, entering college, the boy must choose his field of study, his father quietly turns his attention toward those courses which will be of maximum benefit if he later enters medical school. When, half way through medical school, the boy must consider the problem of final specialization, his father talks with him at length about the type of medical work in which he himself has found a lifetime of opportunity and satisfaction. It is in ways like these that we now picture God's guidance of His children's lives. You say you cannot believe God is concerned over every decision you make? Few of us believe He is. You say you

have the firm conviction you make your own choices and that you can do wrong if you want to? No one would attempt to prove the contrary. The notion of a detailed and an inflexible divine guidance grew out of the belief in predestination, and that belief rested on an oversimplified view of life. God permits each one of us follow his own course of action for days or weeks or even years. But when we reach a crossroad God acts. By influencing the few major choices of our career God can bring us, in the end, where He wants us to be.

How does God guide us in these crises? The experience of normal people makes it abundantly plain that God does not rearrange miraculously our external situation. Neither does He give us any swift and comprehensive understanding of His entire purpose for our career. What happens was described years ago by Ralph Waldo Emerson. "The great crises in men's lives are not marriages, deaths, or great occasions. They come some afternoon at the turn of the road when new thoughts and new impulses fill the heart." As we stand at a crossroad, wondering which turn to

take, God brings slowly and silently into the bright circle of our attention memories, ideals, ambitions, insights. Through them He influences us to choose and follow the path of His desire. Obviously on such occasions many thoughts and impulses fill the heart, and between them we must distinguish with the greatest care. Our disciplined intelligence and our understanding of ourselves must tell us whether we are listening to the voice of a cleverly disguised animal-impulse, the voice of a comforting superstition, or the voice of that Greater Wisdom which speaks to us through our keenest intelligence and deepest kindness. Granted that such discrimination is not easy, and that on many occasions well-intentioned individuals are led astray. The experience of gaining a gradual, quiet, and definitely beneficial inward illumination is familiar to innumerable people. Matthew Arnold gives this description of such an experience at its best.

A bolt is shot back somewhere in the breast,  
A lost pulse of feeling stirs again,  
The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain.  
A man becomes aware of his life's flow,

He hears its winding murmur, and he sees  
The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze;  
An air of coolness plays upon his face  
And an unwonted calm pervades his breast,  
And then he thinks he knows  
The Hills where his life rose  
And the Sea where it goes.<sup>2</sup>

In moments like that and through experiences like that God gives inner guidance to those who seek it patiently.

#### IV

A third fact which has helped many of us as we have tried to gain a new and a more satisfying conception of God's care, is this. Apparently God can, and does, devise a second use for a human life when the first is wrecked by disaster. Human parents, of course, do this constantly. If a doctor's plans for his son's career are overthrown by accident or by the boy's own blunders, the father—if he is a normal parent—does not abandon his interest in the boy or terminate his efforts in the boy's behalf. Rather he does all he

<sup>2</sup> In *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse*, p. 232. Oxford University Press.

can to make the best of an admittedly tragic situation, find some new use for whatever abilities his son still possesses. If this is the rule for human parents may it not well be the rule for the Unseen Father of us all?

In 1892 a young man named Robert Byers lay helpless in a tiny bedroom in one of the suburbs of Adelaide, Australia. He was paralyzed from head to foot, unable even to lift food to his mouth. For some years his sight and hearing were unaffected, but beginning in 1900 the paralysis gradually spread to those nerve centers. By 1906 he was totally blind and almost totally deaf. All he could do was lie motionless in bed, think about his tragic plight, and converse in slow sentences with the few friends who came to see him. Obviously whatever use God had initially planned for his life had been utterly and permanently wrecked by the accident of paralysis. But did this mean that God had stopped caring for Robert Byers? Did it mean that God could find no second use for whatever abilities were left?

One day in 1911 Byers confided to a friend an

idea that had dawned in his ever-active mind. He said, "I have many friends, but there are other blind people—particularly blind children—who have none. I shall try to interest my friends in the work of helping those children." His plan was simple—to ask each of his friends to give him a small annual gift as a birthday offering for a needy child. He would then combine those gifts and use the money where it promised to do the most good. That brave effort began in 1911, and by 1925 Robert Byers—still lying motionless in that tiny room in Windsor—was receiving gifts from some 1,500 contributors scattered all over the world. Their donations totalled between \$5,000 and \$6,000 per year, and with this money Byers was helping no less than eighty blind boys and girls scattered through twenty-one different lands. He was, for example, providing the funds for the maintenance of a cot in a hospital for blind children in India, funds for the maintenance of two cots in a similar hospital in Palestine, and funds for the maintenance of a Braille press operated by blind Japanese boys in Japan. Naturally his benefactions spread far beyond the



lives of the children immediately affected by his kindness, and became an important factor in maintaining philanthropic work in many needy areas. From Ceylon to China, from Fiji to Brazil, the trail of his kindness ran. Then, in the spring of 1926, he died. Did death halt his work? Immediately his friends, inspired by his pluck and his unselfishness, formed an organization to perpetuate his efforts and his memory. From headquarters in Melbourne, Australia, that work now carries on.<sup>3</sup> Did paralysis halt permanently God's use of Byers' life? It may have wrecked an initial plan, but when the first plan could not be fulfilled God did what any human parent would have done. God gave Byers a second chance.

## V

In the light of these facts liberal Protestants are now gradually formulating a new theory of God's guidance and God's care of individuals. This theory bears no resemblance whatever to the rigid theory of predestination which filled such a

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from *The Age* (Melbourne, Australia) for May 5, 1926. The Mission perpetuating Byers' work is located at 48a Queen Street, Melbourne C 1, Victoria, Australia.

large place in early Protestant teaching. The new theory admits we are in a complex world in which many forces are operating and where tragic accidents are of hourly occurrence. It admits further that God never overrules human free-will, and that He never interrupts the course of Nature by miraculous interference. But it then asserts that God, like each one of us, is a center of creative activity in a world of unbroken and unbreakable law. It claims that God is constantly at work within human minds and hearts, seeking to carry out His wise and kindly purposes. If accident or disaster interferes with those purposes God quietly readjusts His plans, using us in new ways and employing whatever abilities are still available within our life. All He asks us to do, at any time or under any circumstances, is to live at our own best. That effort on our part opens the way for Him to carry out, no matter what may happen, a wise and kindly purpose for us and with us. It is a purpose which involves the development of our own finer powers, and which uses us in the world-wide and age-long effort to increase intelligence, skill, and kindness within

human hearts. "What shall separate us from the love of God?" \* The New Protestantism, like the forms of Christianity which have preceded it, is convinced that nothing can ever carry human personalities beyond the reach of the divine care.

More than a century ago Jean Paul Richter, one of the eighteenth-century skeptics, drew this bleak picture of a world without God. "There is no God. I have traversed the worlds, I have risen to the suns, I have passed athwart the great waste places of the sky. I have descended to the place where the very shadow cast by Being dies out and ends. I have gazed into the gulf beyond and cried, 'Father, where art Thou?' But no answer came, save the sound of the eternal storm which rages uncontrolled. We are orphans, you and I. Every soul in this vast corpse-trench of the universe is utterly alone." Beside that picture of human loneliness and despair put the picture drawn some years later by Harriet Beecher Stowe. It anticipated the view of life now taught by the New Protestantism.

\* Romans 8:35.

Still, still with Thee, when purple morning breaketh,  
When the bird waketh and the shadows flee;  
Fairer than morning, lovelier than the daylight,  
Dawns the sweet consciousness I am with Thee.

Here is the very heart of the new faith. It is the sense, amid all the changes life brings, of the abiding presence and love of God.

## CHAPTER VII

### WHAT MAKES RIGHT RIGHT

#### I

IN one of his books Dr. Hendrik Van Loon gives this interesting description of a primitive man. "The great-great-grandfather of the human race was a very ugly creature. He was quite small, much smaller than people are to-day. His skin was tanned a deep brown by the sun and the wind, and his head and most of his body were covered with long, coarse hair. His thin fingers made his hands resemble the paws of a monkey, and his jaw was the jaw of an animal which uses its teeth for both knife and fork. He lived in the damp blackness of vast forests, and when he was hungry he ate leaves and roots or maybe an egg stolen from the nest of an angry bird. Once in a while, after a long chase, he would catch a rabbit or a small wild dog and devour the flesh raw. He had not yet discovered that the flavor of meat

is improved by cooking. If he hurt himself—and hunting creatures like primitive men are forever spraining their ankles or breaking their legs—he had no one to help him, and he died a horrible death in the silence of the forest.”<sup>1</sup> What did such creatures know about the difference between right and wrong, or about the principle which underlies moral judgments? Nothing at all. It was at this low level that the evolution of moral standards and moral judgments began.

That evolution was initiated by two things. One was the steady increase in the number of human beings. The mortality among primitive children was of course terrific, but fortunately for the future of the race the sex-impulse was—as in the case of the animals—of resistless power. Thus the birth rate more than kept pace with the death rate, and in the course of time human beings appeared in every habitable locality. The other thing responsible for the emergence of moral standards was the gradual gathering of people in the areas most favorable to food

<sup>1</sup> See Hendrik Van Loon, *The Story of Mankind*, pp. 9 and 10. Liveright, Inc.

production. This concentration resulted partly from deliberate migration and partly from the blind process of selective survival. The tribes that lived near an adequate and unfailing food-supply multiplied and became powerful, while those that lived in less favorable localities—such as deserts, forests, or rugged mountains—tended to die out. Thus the desirable areas were gradually populated, and the great venture of community life began.

But when the first communities took shape a baffling problem inevitably emerged with them. How could people live together with a minimum of conflict and slaughter? What rules, followed by everyone in the interests of the common welfare, would make a peaceful and a stable community possible? Whether primitive men wanted to devise codes of conduct or not they were compelled to do so. Whether they understood the significance of their action or not, they began drawing up lists of acts which were allowed and lists of acts which were not allowed. Only as rules were established and observance of the rules enforced could the community hold together and

the conflicting claims of rival individuals be settled with a minimum of friction and suffering.

## II

Some of the rules which thus made their appearance had their origin in coincidence and superstition, and in the course of time were gradually abandoned. Such, for example, was the primitive rule that no one in the community should kindle a fire on a sacred day for fear of angering the divinity in whose honor the day had been set apart.<sup>2</sup> For uncounted centuries that rule was observed among certain groups of Jews, and traces of it persisted until recent times in the domestic taboos of certain Puritan families. But when experience proved that the individuals who did kindle fires on the sacred day usually suffered no ill-effects from the action, the ancient rule—originating undoubtedly in the combination of coincidence and superstitious fear—inevitably fell into disuse.

Other rules devised by primitive men proved valuable for a time but as the social situation

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 35:3.



changed lost their worth. Then these rules too were laid aside. In one of the oldest strata of the Old Testament such a rule is preserved. It says that Hebrews shall not eat the flesh of an animal that has died from disease or from wounds, but that Hebrews are at liberty to sell such meat to their non-Hebrew neighbors.<sup>3</sup> Evidently someone discovered that, for some unaccountable reason, the individuals who ate contaminated meat suffered violently. In some instances they actually died, victims of what we now realize was ptomaine poisoning. A rule against eating such meat was thus promulgated, but coupled with it was the curious provision that Hebrews were at liberty to sell the meat to unsuspecting Gentiles! Only when the era of regular trading began, and Hebrew meat-dealers realized that satisfied customers are essential to future business transactions, was the original rule quietly and inevitably amended.

But while many of the rules thus formulated by primitive men proved short-lived, a few of their rules proved of such value that they have

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 14:21.

persisted until our own time. The list of moral laws contained in the Ten Commandments<sup>4</sup> belongs in this category. Early in our racial life men discovered that it was not possible to have a stable and peaceful community life unless everyone in the community tacitly agreed to respect the property of his neighbors. Men also learned that the common welfare was seriously imperiled if the members of the community, or even a few of them, were untruthful. Men also found that the problems connected with the organization of homes and the bearing and training of children were immensely complicated if sex-intercourse were not regulated and controlled. How could the paternity of children be established, and the responsibility for their support and training be properly allocated, unless there were definite rules affecting sexual relationships between adults, and unless those rules were—in the interests of the common welfare—firmly enforced? Thus, at an early period in our racial evolution, three basic rules of right and wrong came into being—"Thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness,

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 20:3-17.

thou shalt not commit adultery." These prohibitions did not grow out of ignorance, nor were they perpetuated in blindness. They were restrictions relentlessly and inevitably laid on every individual who became a member of a community and who, in return for the benefits given him by the community, surrendered a portion of the personal liberty which might have been his had he continued a semi-solitary existence in a cave or on a desert.

Are all the rules contained in the Ten Commandments permanently valuable? Consider two of them carefully. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." <sup>5</sup> Obviously that rule implies there are other gods, and obviously it originated at a time when polytheistic beliefs and practices were common. It has, quite clearly, no meaning for a society which has outgrown polytheism and organized its religion on a monotheistic basis. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image." <sup>6</sup> Clearly this rule originated in communities which practiced idolatry, and equally clearly it is meaningless in communities which—

<sup>5</sup> Exodus 20:3.

<sup>6</sup> Exodus 20:4.

like our own—have left idolatrous beliefs and practices behind. Some of the Ten Commandments still have meaning, immense meaning, for the modern world. But at least two of the Ten Commandments have now only a historic interest and value. Thus even our most familiar and important moral code is affected by that relentless process of growth and change which permeates and dominates our world.

### III

All this helps us understand the complex situation we find in communities to-day. Now, as always, the social environment is undergoing change, and codes of conduct are subjected—deliberately or unwittingly—to an inevitable and relentless process of revision. In modern society four separate processes which affect our moral judgments are now going on.

To begin with, many acts which our predecessors termed wrong we now realize are right. Our predecessors called them wrong because our predecessors thought they injured, or at least imperiled, community life. We call these same acts

right because, thanks to our ampler experience and our wider observation, we realize they are a benefit rather than a detriment to groups and individuals. Consider, for example, the recent shift in our attitude toward amusements. Sixty years ago many American schools rigidly prohibited "play" of any kind. The pupils were compelled to rise at five in the morning, both summer and winter. Their indoor recreation consisted in the simpler forms of carpentry and needle-work, and their outdoor recreation was carefully restricted to activities as harmless and sedate as walking or riding. Cards, dances, and theatricals were strictly forbidden, and the leaders in these schools boasted that amusements had no place in the life of the students. Why were the teachers in such schools so bitterly opposed to "play"? Because they believed the effects of play were harmful. To-day most of us are convinced that a reasonable amount of play has a distinctly beneficial effect, and that some of the most important parts of a school's equipment are its athletic field, its gymnasium, its swimming pool, its theater, and its game-room. It is a change in our estimate of the

effects of play which has led to this reversal, within the past sixty years, of a moral judgment. It is this shift in conviction and attitude which explains why most of us to-day hold to-day beliefs about theater-going, card-playing, and dancing which are diametrically opposed to the beliefs widely held only a few decades ago.

Conversely, many acts which our predecessors counted right we now realize are, and have always been, wrong. We realize they are wrong, and have always been wrong, because we see as our predecessors were unable to see that their ultimate social effects are disastrous. Lotteries furnish an interesting example. Lotteries were introduced into England about the year 1500 and speedily became immensely popular. They not only satisfied the gambling instinct which is deeply embedded in human nature, but they also offered an easy way to raise money for charity. In 1612 the struggling English colonists in Virginia were greatly aided by the proceeds of a lottery organized in their behalf by a group of kind-hearted friends in England. In 1750 Yale College raised the funds for a much-needed new

building by means of a lottery. Harvard College, not to be outdone by its rival, presently organized two lotteries, each of which was highly successful. The lottery of 1805 netted Harvard a profit of \$23,000 and made possible the erection of Stoughton Hall. The lottery of 1812 brought in a profit of \$25,000, and paid for Holworthy Hall. But only twenty-one years later, in 1833, lotteries were officially banned by both Massachusetts and New York, and shortly thereafter most other States passed similar legislation. An act which was counted right in 1812 was declared wrong in 1833. Why this change in moral judgment? Because by 1833 the evidence proved that lotteries are socially harmful. They take money from a multitude of poor people and give it, on the basis of sheer chance, to a few individuals who have done nothing to earn it. They create in the minds of children the false notion that a man may make a satisfactory living by investing in lotteries and drawing an occasional prize, and thus divert attention from the immensely important task of learning to do work which is creative and socially valuable. They stimulate im-

mensely the gambling impulse, an impulse which—as all thoughtful people realize—needs control rather than additional encouragement. This is the case against lotteries, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century it had become so strong that lotteries were thenceforth officially prohibited.

The third process going on to-day is less obvious but quite as significant. Asked to rule upon the morality of certain acts, many thoughtful people frankly refuse to pass judgment. They insist no moral verdict can be rendered on the action in question until more evidence as to ultimate social consequences is available. Is capital punishment right or wrong? Many people, fastening their attention on the undoubted element of security which accrues to a community when an habitual criminal is electrocuted, insist that capital punishment is right. That is, they claim its ultimate effects are helpful rather than harmful to the community. But other people, recalling the mistakes made by many courts and remembering the brutalizing influence exerted by newspaper accounts of executions, insist that



capital punishment is wrong. That is, they claim its ultimate effects are harmful rather than helpful. There are similar differences in opinion on divorce, on war, and on the attempt to control the liquor traffic by strict governmental prohibition. Are these disputed acts right or wrong? The only thing we can say is that thoughtful people do not agree. Adequate and conclusive evidence is not yet in, and until the future brings it in there will continue to be grave uncertainty as to the moral quality of these courses of action.

But while moral verdicts on some acts have changed, and while moral verdicts on other acts cannot yet be announced with any finality, moral verdicts on still other acts are plain and unchanging. We know, for example, that theft and dishonesty are wrong. They are wrong because, as centuries of human experience have shown, they imperil community life. We know that adultery is wrong. It is wrong because, as the long record of human life shows plainly, it leads to ultimate and far-reaching misery. Conversely we know that sexual self-control, honesty, and truthfulness are right. They are right because, as the experi-

ence of the generations has demonstrated, they lead to the enrichment and the ennoblement of human life. The final definition of right and wrong which thus emerges from our modern analysis is so simple that even a child can grasp its meaning. An act is called right if, in the test of actual and long-continued experience, it proves helpful to the community as a whole. An act is called wrong if, by this same test, it proves harmful. It is social utility which makes certain courses of conduct right, and social inutility which makes others wrong. The opinions of ministers, the say-so of Puritans, the rules laid down in the Bible have—in the final analysis—nothing to do with the matter. The thing that counts is human experience, and on a vast number of ethical questions the ruling of experience is unmistakable.

#### IV.

Face to face with the moral confusion of to-day, and confronted by the ethical uncertainties of the rising generation, what does the New Protestantism propose to do? It proposes first of

all to explain to young people what makes right right and wrong wrong. When boys and girls understand that our major moral verdicts are ultimately supported, not by a verse in the Bible or the opinion of a few local elders, but by the sobering record of some six thousand years of recorded human experience, they will show a new respect for, and a new confidence in, those verdicts. After we have thus explained the basis of moral standards we propose to acquaint our children with the codes of conduct which the generations have slowly and painfully established. If it is important to tell boys and girls what humanity has learned about science and mathematics, it is surely equally important to tell boys and girls what humanity has learned about the probable consequences of different courses of action. When this hard-won moral wisdom has thus been shared with our successors, we propose to tell our children frankly that there are problems still to be solved, ethical values still to be established, new codes of conduct still to be formulated. The world in which we live and the society of which we are a part are still changing, and these

changes force on us and our children not only the task of reëxamining old moral verdicts but in addition the far more difficult task of establishing new moral certainties. For that great work, humanity's never-finished task, the coming generation needs something very different from a blind willingness to accept alleged moral revelations. The coming generation needs an appreciation of the wisdom already won, an understanding of the problems yet to be solved, and above all the grace of a fearless, well-disciplined mind. To the task of bringing this equipment to the men and women of to-morrow the New Protestantism must and will address itself in the coming years.

## CHAPTER VIII

### WHY HUMAN BEINGS DO WRONG

#### I

THE early Protestants traced sin to two ultimate sources. The first was a perverted human nature. On the basis of the familiar story in Genesis <sup>1</sup> they said that Adam and Eve, the founders of the human race, had deliberately disobeyed God by eating the fruit of a forbidden tree. As a punishment for their sin God cursed them and all their descendants. One result of this curse is that every child who enters the world carries in his heart a mass of evil instincts and perverted desires. Until this corruption of his nature is healed he finds himself tending to do wrong instead of right. Our generation, seeing in the Book of Genesis mere fragments of primitive folklore, finds the tale of Adam and Eve essentially incredible. But the early Protestants

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:1-24.

felt differently. How seriously Luther regarded even the details of the story we can judge from a statement he made on one occasion. "Adam and Eve entered the Garden about noon; and Eve, having a desire to eat, plucked the apple. Then came the Fall of Man, according to our account at about two o'clock." <sup>2</sup>

The second source of evil in human life was, according to the early Protestants, the host of demons forever active in the world. Here again modern men find it difficult to appreciate the point of view of the sixteenth century. For us evil spirits are mere figments of the imagination, and the Devil is an utterly fantastic creature in whom men have long since ceased to believe. But to the Protestants of day-before-yesterday the demonic realm was as real as the angelic one, and Satan quite as near as God. On one occasion Luther wrote, "Let the Christian know that he is seated in the midst of demons, and that the Devil is closer to him than his coat or his shirt." <sup>3</sup> Why did human beings so often do wrong? Partly

<sup>2</sup> See A. D. White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology*, Vol. I, p. 288. D. Appleton.

<sup>3</sup> See A. D. White, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 114.

because they were "conceived in sin" and "shapen in iniquity." <sup>4</sup> Partly because evil spirits were constantly inciting them to wickedness. Did not the Bible say that on one occasion Satan himself had entered into Judas and moved him to betray his Lord? <sup>5</sup>

Just as the first Protestants had a simple theory of the origin of sin so they had a simple theory of the way by which sin could be conquered. According to their theory the perversity of human nature is corrected by the sacrament of baptism, administered preferably at a very early date. When an individual is baptized his sins are forgiven, his evil nature is regenerated, and he is given a divine grace which enables him to begin living in righteousness. The statements of the Westminster Confession are clear and explicit on these points. "Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 51:5.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 22:3.

remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God through Jesus Christ to walk in newness of life.”<sup>6</sup>

While the perversion of an evil nature is thus corrected by baptism, the incessant attacks of the demons are warded off by the combination of prayer, struggle, and the use of formulæ of exorcism. Luther’s modern admirers may be surprised and somewhat distressed to find that he not only believed in but practiced exorcism. But the evidence is plain. Just as the early Protestants accepted without question the current belief in demons, so they accepted without question the current methods of conquering the demons. When Luther was asked how the evil spirits who brought thunderstorms could be driven away, he replied that he himself had often succeeded in dispelling them by making the sign of the cross and repeating a brief but immensely powerful phrase found in the Gospel of John—“The Word was made flesh.”<sup>7</sup>

But in spite of all these efforts men still did

<sup>6</sup> *The Westminster Confession*, Chapter 28.

<sup>7</sup> See A. D. White, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 342.



wrong. How could their sin be forgiven, and the eternal punishment due them as sinners be averted? The early Protestants took over without serious alteration the doctrine of a substitutionary atonement which had been formulated by Paul, and then repeated century after century by the Catholic theologians of the mediæval period. What Luther's belief was we can judge from a gruesome passage in his commentary on Galatians. "We are clean overwhelmed and drowned in sin. We are enemies of God, subject to His wrath, and guilty of eternal death. Nothing can pacify God but the blood and death of His own Son." From the early Protestants this doctrine of a vicarious atonement came down to the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. As long as men accepted the Bible as a divinely inspired and verbally infallible document this doctrine could neither be abandoned nor modified, for it is stated repeatedly in the New Testament and "prefigured" many times in the Old. Through numberless books, sermons, prayers, and hymns this belief in a substitutionary atonement, the sacrifice of an innocent Jesus to pay the penalty due

a guilty world, was thus taught to successive generations of Protestants.

There is a fountain filled with blood  
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins,  
And sinners plunged beneath that flood  
Lose all their guilty stains.

The dying thief rejoiced to see  
That fountain in his day,  
And there may I, though vile as he,  
Wash all my sins away.\*

In those stanzas, not only familiar but highly popular during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the ancient theory of a blood atonement found its climactic expression.

## II

Why have these ideas been abandoned by more and more people during the twentieth century? Three major reasons might be mentioned. The first is the influence of modern Bible study. When men began to break free from the idea that every statement in the Bible is true, and

\* William Cowper. This hymn was written in 1779.

began to inquire freely whether the theories of the Biblical writers actually represent the final word of wisdom, the Scriptural account of the origin of sin and the method of procuring forgiveness of sin was doomed. Men inevitably ceased believing that human nature has been perverted by Adam's sin, that demons are inciting human beings to wickedness, that baptism and exorcism are correctives for evil desire, and that the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross has turned God from His fury against sinners. Along with these negative influences set in motion by modern Bible study, there came of course many positive influences created by modern religious thinking. As men thought about the character of God and drew the inevitable conclusions from the Love they are convinced stands at the center of things, they realized that God would not and could not take the cruel attitude attributed to Him by many of the early Protestants. The stanzas which John Greenleaf Whittier published in 1865 show the direction in which religious thought had already begun to move.

The wrong that pains my soul below  
I dare not throne above,  
I know not of His hate, I know  
His goodness and His love.  
And Thou, O Lord, by whom are seen  
Thy creatures as they be,  
Forgive me if too close I lean  
My human heart on Thee!

But the most significant of the forces precipitating a change in belief came from an entirely different quarter. The theory of evolution, propounded in the middle of the nineteenth century and soon substantiated by a mass of evidence, offered a new and a convincing explanation of the evil impulses in human hearts. Men realized at last that life had first appeared in lowly forms, that it had worked its way up through the animal to the human realm, and that the cruel and vicious tendencies which disfigure human character to-day represent the survival of ancient animal instincts. Greed, gluttony, sexual passion, hatred of enemies, the thirst for revenge—all these things are legacies from a far-off jungle world. In that world such insistent and resistless desires

had an obvious value in the protection and preservation of the species. Now, in the entirely new human environment, these impulses are overstrong and dangerously out of place. Unless they are controlled by a trained mind and a disciplined will they lead to disaster. Why do human beings do wrong? Not because the sin of Adam perverted their nature. Not because evil spirits are inciting them to wickedness. Rather because human beings are the descendants of animals, and because traces of the ape and the tiger are still present and active in us all. Here is the new knowledge which has come during the last few decades. It has suddenly discredited and overthrown the purely speculative theory of sin which dominated Christian thinking from the days of Paul to those of Darwin. It has forced upon the Christian leaders of our time the responsibility of shaping new beliefs about sin and devising new techniques for mastering it.

### III

The New Protestantism is now grappling with these two tasks. In attempting to explain the evil

tendencies present in human lives, it abandons completely the notion of original sin and the belief in demonic activity, and traces all the dangerous impulses in men's hearts to inheritances drawn from the jungle world. In the case of certain sins—greed and lust, for example—the connection between the animal and the human realms is clear. In the case of other evil tendencies the connection is disclosed only after careful study and analysis. What, for example, is the source of the all-too-common tendency to worry? Worry represents a veiled survival of the animal instinct of fear. In the jungle world the tendency to fear the unknown and the uncertain was of immense benefit. It kept animals out of danger, rescued them repeatedly from the perils that lurked on every side. Only those animals that possessed an adequate amount of fear survived, and through them the fear-impulse was thus bred deeper and deeper into animal nature as the centuries passed. From the animals this tendency was passed on to primitive men, and from primitive men it came to us. In the new and relatively safe environment of to-day there is no need for

such constant dread of the unknown and the uncertain, but the ancient impulse still survives. Unless it is kept under rigorous control it overflows and becomes generalized apprehensiveness or—to use the familiar term—worry. It is in ways like these that the New Protestantism is now studying and analyzing problems of evil impulse and desire. Who doubts there has been a memorable advance since the days when the discussion of such problems moved on the level of proof-texts and formulæ of exorcism?

If animal inheritance is the ultimate source of human sin, what is the technique of conquering that sin? Here again Protestant thought is beginning to move in wholly new directions and explore entirely new fields. Most liberal Protestants now agree that if an individual seeks to master his animal impulses he must begin his effort by recognizing the source of his difficulty and gaining a thorough understanding of his problem. Once he gains this "insight" he must go on to develop within his own life forces for good which will prove powerful enough to counteract the all-too-familiar forces for evil. Natu-

rally such an effort varies with different individuals. In one case it may involve the development of new activities, the acquisition of new friendships, or withdrawal from an old and dangerous environment into a new and a distinctly helpful one. In another case this effort may involve the deliberate and frequent exposure of the self to the particular set of spiritual and emotional influences which the individual finds inspiring. The final step in the reconstruction of the personality involves the building of social relationships which will call forth within the self new interests, new objectives, and new abilities. It is the development of such new relationships which explains, in part at least, the extraordinary improvement of the self we often see when two young people marry, build a home, and have children of their own. The new situations they create for themselves and the new tasks they lay upon themselves serve, in numberless instances, to effect significant alterations in the personality of each of the two parents. Granted that such methods of analyzing and conquering evil tendencies are wholly different from those practiced



in the past by revivalists and "personal workers." Is it not increasingly plain that we have moved a long way forward in our understanding of the problem of sin and in our ability to solve it?

When we turn from the task of controlling evil tendencies in the individual to the task of controlling evil tendencies in society our difficulties obviously become far more bewildering and far more complex. Curiously enough, many of the early Protestants ignored completely this problem of social sin. In the immortal tale of *Pilgrim's Progress* John Bunyan was content to bring Christian into the Celestial City and leave the far-off City of Destruction to continue its evil ways undisturbed. According to our modern point of view, the saving of that City was far more important than the saving of Christian, and until the City of Destruction was changed—transformed into a Celestial City—the story was not finished. How does the New Protestantism propose to conquer the evil in society, remake communities as well as individuals? This effort involves literally scores of new undertakings. It means segregating the individuals who are sub-

normal, mentally and morally, and preventing them from perpetuating their kind. It means clearing away such breeding places of animalism as city slums and noisome tenements. It means establishing schools, playgrounds, welfare agencies, and character-building institutions of many types, through all of which new ideas, ideals, and forces for good can be spread abroad. It means setting up within the churches a new type of ethical and religious instruction, one from which the men and women of to-morrow can gain a new understanding of themselves, their community, and the problems modern life is forcing upon us all. The New Protestantism is just beginning to undertake these new and immensely significant ventures. Through them it will ultimately find the way not only to save Christian but also to transform the City of Destruction. Hitherto Christianity has contented itself with the first achievement. In the coming years it will seek both.

#### IV

What is God's attitude toward men who have yielded to their animal inheritance? Does He

demand a price for His forgiveness and His help? As long as Protestantism was committed to the task of believing every statement in the Bible and working all the Biblical material into a coherent system of doctrine, the elaboration of a complicated theory relating to the conditions of divine forgiveness was inevitable. Paul's many speculations on these points had to be accepted as permanently and infallibly true, and none of them could be laid aside as essentially inaccurate. To-day the passing of the ancient attitude toward the Bible has changed the situation radically—at least as far as liberal Protestants are concerned. Men now feel free to think their own thoughts, draw the logical conclusions from their own experience and reason. Suppose there is at the heart of things the Kindly Helper in whom life impels us to believe. Suppose Jesus' conviction that everyone who seeks God's friendship and help finds it, is true. What attitude would such a God take toward the human beings who, beset by an animal inheritance, fail to reach the higher levels of intelligence, skill, and kindness? Such a God would certainly not demand a heavy price for His

forgiveness and His help. He would surely not prepare everlasting torment for those in whom the relics of animalism are still too strong and the essential human qualities of ambition and moral idealism too weak. A loving God would do for needy men and women exactly what human beings at their best do for them. He would forgive all those who are truly penitent, help all those who honestly try to do their best. This is what the New Protestantism believes God does, and will continue to do throughout the eternity that confronts us all. The Prodigal Son may go to a far country and remain there for a long time. But when he finally returns he will find his father waiting for him, ready and willing to forgive him, and eager to help him make a new start.

My little son, who looked from thoughtful eyes  
And moved and spoke in quiet, grown-up wise,  
Having my law the seventh time disobeyed  
I struck him, and dismissed  
With hard words and unkissed,  
His mother, who was patient, being dead.  
Then, fearing lest his grief should hinder sleep,

I visited his bed,  
But found him slumbering deep  
With darkened eyelids, and their lashes yet  
From his late sobbing wet.  
And I with moan  
Kissing away his tears left others of my own;  
For on a table drawn beside his head  
He had put within his reach  
A box of counters and a red-veined stone,  
A piece of glass abraded by the beach,  
And two French copper coins, ranged there with  
careful art  
To comfort his sad heart.  
So when that night I prayed  
To God I wept and said:  
"Ah, when at last we lie with trancèd breath,  
Not vexing Thee in death,  
And Thou rememberest of what toys  
We made our joys,  
How weakly understood  
Thy great commanded good,  
Then—fatherly not less  
Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the clay—  
Thou wilt leave Thy wrath and say,  
'I will be sorry for their childishness.' " \*

\* Coventry Patmore, in *Poems*, complete edition. G. Bell & Sons, London, Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York.

## CHAPTER IX

### WHAT JESUS MEANS TO A MODERN LIBERAL

#### I

WHEN Protestantism began its career it took over without radical change the conception of Jesus which had been current in the Christian world for nearly fifteen hundred years. This was the conception which had been originally formulated by Paul and John, and which attained fairly definite form in the second century of our era. The Westminster Confession stated in clear and impressive language this interpretation of Jesus' life and work. "It pleased God to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man; unto whom He did from all eternity give a people to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified. The Son of God, the second person

in the Trinity, did when the fulness of time was come take upon him man's nature, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary. He was crucified and died, was buried and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption. On the third day he rose from the dead with the same body in which he suffered, with which also he ascended into heaven and there sitteth at the right hand of his Father, making intercession. He shall return to judge men and angels at the end of the world. To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same; making intercession for them and revealing unto them, in and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation." <sup>1</sup> This statement pictures Jesus in terms of a divine redeemer who had incarnated himself in human form, offered himself to God through death as a vicarious sacrifice for those whom he wished to rescue from eternal doom, and finally ascended in triumph to the sky to await the day when he would return to judge the world and welcome the elect

<sup>1</sup> *The Westminster Confession*, Chapter 8 (condensed).

to eternal bliss in Paradise. In such an account of Jesus and his work little was said about Jesus' teaching. The emphasis was laid on the great mysteries of the incarnation, the atonement, the resurrection, and the coming world-judgment. Needless to say, the entire conception was drawn from the Bible, and rested on the assumption that the Bible was a divinely inspired and verbally infallible document.

For many decades Protestantism retained unchanged this picture of Jesus. Through innumerable books, sermons, prayers, and hymns it was held before the world as wholly and permanently true—an accurate portrait of the God-man who had lived in Palestine many centuries before. Consider the poem which Edward Perronet wrote in 1779, and which soon became one of the favorite hymns of the Protestant world.

Ye seed of Israel's chosen race,  
Ye ransomed from the Fall,  
Hail him who saves you by his grace  
And crown him Lord of all!  
Sinners whose love can ne'er forget  
The wormwood and the gall,  
Go spread your trophies at his feet  
And crown him Lord of all!



In those lines we see the continuation of the ideas Paul had formulated in the first century, and which mediæval Christians had accepted without question. Those ideas were destined to survive as long as the Biblical foundation on which they were built survived, and only so long. How could they last when, through a revolution in men's ways of thinking, the belief in the infallibility of the Bible passed away? This was the change which began a few decades after Perrenet published the poem we were just quoting. As that change went on, the Biblical interpretation of Jesus underwent a more and more rigorous scrutiny. Men everywhere sensed the fact they were free to criticize it, alter it, or even abandon it entirely. As this process of analysis and evaluation continued, three divergent conceptions of Jesus made their appearance within the liberal branch of Protestantism. It is between these three conceptions that progressive Protestants to-day are trying to choose.

## II

According to the first of these conceptions, Jesus is the combination of a great religious

teacher and a divine Savior. Christians should therefore not merely follow his teachings but also worship and adore him personally. The individuals who thus interpret Jesus usually say little about the doctrines of the incarnation and the atonement, and nothing whatever about the doctrines of original sin and the election of a predestinated few for eternal salvation. But, having thus laid aside the less attractive features of the early portrait of a divine Savior, they cling to the remainder of that portrait with passionate devotion. Canon Charles E. Raven of Oxford has recently given a clear and vigorous statement of this view of Jesus. "Christianity is unique among religions in being at once an illumination and a redemption. Its peculiar power has come not from those who have taken Jesus as the best example of an altruistic theism but from those who have adored him as Savior and Son of God. It is a vital issue to-day whether Christianity is a religion of ideas of which Jesus was the outstanding spokesman, or a religion of a Personality unique in quality. Is our essential experience the acceptance of certain beliefs about God and man

and the universe, or is it the communion of persons with a Person who embodies and transcends these ideas? If Christianity is only a more exalted type of Judaism, if it differs from any other philosophy only in possessing more worthy concepts, then of course the passionate evangelism that asks for decisions and self-surrender is out of place. But if Christianity is radically unlike other religions in appealing not only or even primarily to man's sense of values but to his devotion to a Person; if it is right in finding God not in abstractions like love or goodness but supremely incarnate in Jesus; then a mild program of philanthropic service will not satisfy, and proselyting (ugly word though it be) becomes an inescapable obligation."<sup>2</sup>

Such an interpretation of Jesus, as the combination of a great teacher and a divine Savior, naturally lends itself to mystical elaboration. Among liberal Protestants to-day we thus find many individuals who feel they have a spiritual contact not only with God but also with "the

<sup>2</sup> See "What Is the Christian Message?" in *The Christian Century* for February 1, 1933.

Living Christ." Their prayers are addressed to Christ, the spiritual help they receive day by day is said to come from him, and their experience of communion with the Someone Beyond is asserted to be communion with him. Perhaps the most familiar, and certainly a singularly beautiful, expression of this faith is found in a poem which John Greenleaf Whittier wrote in 1866. He had already broken with the rigid orthodoxy of his day, as the superb stanzas of "The Eternal Goodness" indicate plainly. But Whittier still clung to a modified form of the ancient interpretation of Jesus. For him Jesus was a Being with whom Christians might at any time come in immediate spiritual contact. With this idea in mind he wrote eight lines which the Protestant world has been singing ever since.

We may not climb the heavenly steeps  
To bring the Lord Christ down,  
In vain we search the lowest deeps  
For Him no depths can drown.  
But warm, sweet, tender, even yet  
A present help is He;  
And faith hath still its Olivet  
And love its Galilee.

The second of the recent interpretations of Jesus pictures him as humanity's supreme example and ideal. Some of the individuals who hold this view also believe that Jesus is a divine Savior with whom we may come in mystical contact. Others who hold this view share no such subsidiary belief. But both groups unite in regarding Jesus as the perfect and ideal human being, the matchless example after whom our lives, attitudes, and even thoughts should be patterned. Thus when problems emerge in modern life, either in society or in the tiny world of the individual, the part of wisdom is to look toward Jesus, find how he faced and solved these problems, and then do exactly as he did. Perhaps the most familiar expression of this theory is the one found in a volume published in 1899 under the title *In His Steps* and bearing the significant subtitle, "What would Jesus do?" The book attracted so much attention and evoked such hearty response that in 1921 the author published a sequel entitled *In His Steps Today*. This sequel carried the subtitle "What would Jesus do in solving the problems of present political, eco-

monic, and social life?" The theory advanced by these two volumes is clearly indicated by the titles and subtitles. The author maintains that when we are confronted by any modern difficulty we should merely follow Jesus' example, and do so without hesitation or flinching. If we only ask ourselves "What would Jesus do?" and then walk patiently and heroically in Jesus' steps we will find, so the author claims, the answer to our modern questions and the solution of our modern problems.

The inherent and ineradicable weakness of such a theory is, however, increasingly plain. The attempt to follow Jesus blindly and devotedly proves in experience to lead to disaster quite as often as to victory. Are we to "take Jesus in earnest" when he says that disease is caused by demons,<sup>3</sup> when he declares that the world-order he and his friends knew was presently to come to an end,<sup>4</sup> and when he advocates the most extreme form of nonresistance?<sup>5</sup> If so we must not only change but completely revolutionize modern

<sup>3</sup> See Mark 9:17-29.

<sup>4</sup> See Mark 9:1.

<sup>5</sup> See Matthew 5:38-41.

knowledge and modern civilization. Are we to follow in Jesus' steps when he says, "Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow turn not thou away"?<sup>6</sup> If so, the sorry days of indiscriminate charity will return and the era of intelligent and constructive social-work will end. And what are we to do when we find ourselves facing problems which Jesus never encountered at all? Jesus never faced the question of determining wage-scales, the question of deciding how much profit is ethically justifiable, or the question of defining the length of the working day or the working week. Such problems, painfully familiar to the urban and industrial civilization of to-day, lay far beyond the horizon of Jesus' tiny, semi-rural world. To demand in the modern situation that we follow Jesus blindly and ask ourselves constantly what Jesus would do, is to show a singular ignorance of the fact that the very basis of human life has changed in the last nineteen centuries.

If there are these difficulties involved in accepting the second of the recent interpretations

<sup>6</sup> See Matthew 5:42.

of Jesus there are equal difficulties involved in accepting the first. For what does careful study tell us about the supposedly supernatural figures which have appeared in the past? It tells us that these strange men were in reality normal human beings around whom their devoted followers and credulous later generations wove a golden web of legend. The curious experience of Francis Xavier has been recounted many times.<sup>7</sup> Within a century after his death he had been transformed from a tired, perplexed, often defeated, and pitifully human missionary into a miracle-working Saint whose astonishing achievements proved him a member of the supernatural realm. Is there not every reason to believe that a process which altered the actual features of Francis Xavier also operated in the case of Jesus? When we compare the omniscient, omnipotent, preëxistent Christ pictured in John's Gospel with the semi-human Jesus described in the Gospel which Mark had written a generation earlier, we see how swiftly and effectively the myth-

<sup>7</sup> See A. D. White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology*, Vol. II, pp. 5-23. D. Appleton.



making tendency did its work in the closing decades of the first century. When we make adequate allowance for the workings of this same tendency in the period between the writing of Mark's Gospel and the death of Jesus forty years before, and when we try to reconstruct the actual Jesus who lived and taught in Galilee, what do we finally conclude? That Jesus was a human being rather than a Deity, or even a God-man, residing temporarily on earth. As a human being his work was that of a religious and ethical teacher, and his contribution to the life of our race was the group of ideas he offered mankind. It is to this conclusion that the developments of the past century have relentlessly driven liberal Protestantism. It is around the figure of Jesus as a teacher, and nothing more, that the New Protestantism is now building its beliefs.

### III

If Jesus is to be interpreted as a teacher what were the truths he taught? Anyone who studies our all-too-fragmentary records of Jesus' teaching will soon make several significant discoveries.

One is that there are many subjects which Jesus never discussed at all, and on which we have no slightest inkling of his opinion. Again, at many points in his teaching Jesus repeated—as all of us do—the ideas current in his day and in his locality. Some of these ideas now prove to be true, while others prove to be false. It is the presence in Jesus' teaching of these inaccurate elements and these distressing gaps which makes the familiar attempt to follow Jesus blindly so disastrous. Furthermore, the existing record of Jesus' teaching comes to us in documents written by other men many years after Jesus' death. Thus allowance must constantly be made for the possibility of a conscious or unconscious distortion of his ideas. Yet in the Gospel records, incomplete and inaccurate though they are, we find the clear expression of three epoch-making ideas. These ideas, entering the stream of human thought and life in the first century and modifying human beliefs and attitudes ever since, are Jesus' gift to the world.

The first of Jesus' great ideas is that every human being is of infinite value. Whether an indi-

vidual is rich or poor, wise or foolish, virtuous or sinful, socially important or socially insignificant, makes no difference. Simply because he is a human being, a child of God, he is of infinite value and must be respected accordingly. This basic belief of Jesus shines through many of his sayings—notably the stories of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (or as we usually say, the Prodigal Son).<sup>8</sup> From this idea, transmitted first to the Western world and now to all the nations by Jesus' followers, has come a momentous readjustment and transformation of human beliefs, attitudes, and institutions. In the final analysis democratic government, universal education, and socially beneficial legislation find one of their most significant sources in Jesus' teaching that every human being is of infinite value. Furthermore the steady disappearance of practices and institutions which degrade and destroy human life is due in significant measure to the influence of Jesus' great conviction. In a civilization increasingly affected by the idea that human life even in its lowliest and least impressive

<sup>8</sup> Luke 15:3-32.

forms must be respected, such institutions as war, slavery, child labor, and the abuse of women and children are fated to lose their power and eventually disappear. This "higher valuation of personality" is the first and most obvious of the changes Jesus precipitated in human life.

Jesus' second idea was a logical conclusion from the first. Because every human being is of infinite value all of us owe active kindness to everyone we meet. Whether that other individual is of our own race and our own creed makes no difference. Whether he has previously been kind to us or cruel to us does not matter. Simply because he is a human being and needs our help we must do our best for him. This is the idea which found classic expression in the parable of the Good Samaritan,<sup>9</sup> and which appears clearly in the concluding verses in the imaginary account of the Last Judgment.<sup>10</sup> From the idea that active kindness is obligatory on everyone a wholly new spirit has come into our world. The far-flung philanthropies of to-day, and our ever-increasing efforts to develop generosity and social-minded-

<sup>9</sup> Luke 10:25-37.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 25:34-46.

ness in the coming generation, are the concrete and organized expressions of the idea and ideal which Jesus gave the world. No discriminating Christian would claim that Christianity deserves all the credit for the new spirit of kindness which has made the modern world so radically different from the world Jesus knew. But here again the influence of Jesus' teaching, transmitted century after century through thousands of his followers, has been one of the major forces—probably the major force—in precipitating the vast change.

The third of Jesus' great ideas parallels the first two. Just as we value and help each other so there is in our world, Jesus insists, an Unseen but Loving God who values and helps us all. This is the idea underlying many of the passages in the Sermon on the Mount, particularly the great saying, "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you."<sup>11</sup> Is this third element in Jesus' teaching as true as the other two? Some of us are convinced it is. We believe the facts and situations we observe in Nature and history offer ample

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 7:7.

grounds for belief in the reality of the God Jesus described. This book is an attempt to state those grounds, validate this third element in original and essential Christianity. What will be the ultimate effect on human life of this third great conviction of Jesus? In the centuries before us it will almost certainly transform religion, as the other two great ideas have already transformed daily life. When Jesus' own conviction that God's love and help are immediately available to everyone supplants the idea advanced by some of Jesus' interpreters that God's love is rigidly conditioned and that God's help is available to only a few, the long-awaited era of religious tolerance and coöperation will finally begin. Men will realize that though different individuals worship God under different names and through divergent forms and ceremonies, the same Ultimate Reality is reached along these many paths and through these many doors. Around us all, whatever our creed, is the same Divine Love. To us all, whatever our system of belief, the same Divine Help comes. Before us all, whatever our form of worship, the same eternal life opens—an eternal life

in which the growth of personality God has permitted to begin here will finally reach completion.

#### IV

All this suggests what it means, according to the New Protestantism, to be a Christian. A Christian is one who follows Jesus' basic teachings. Being a Christian means nothing more and nothing less. Joining a church, subscribing to a creed, performing religious rituals, attending ecclesiastical gatherings, partaking of mysterious sacraments—all these things have nothing to do with the main matter. A man is a Christian if he follows Jesus in regarding every human being as of infinite value, in showing active kindness toward all those who need his help, and in trusting the Unseen but Kindly God to value him and help him as he makes his own way through life. Anyone who does these things is a Christian—no matter what his race, his creed, his church connection, or his theological opinions. Anyone who does not do these things is not a Christian, no matter how impressive his record for orthodoxy. Here, as far as the New Protestantism can

discover, is the authentic religion of Jesus himself, stripped of the elements of temporary mistake and unhappy misinterpretation. This is the religion the New Protestantism plans to teach, and around which it hopes to rebuild not only the life of the modern church but the wider life of the modern community as well.



## CHAPTER X

### WILL THE NEW PROTESTANTISM ENDURE?

#### I

IN the fall of 1852 a boy from western Massachusetts entered Williams College. Like every new student he was urged to join the college church, and like most new students he eventually did so. When he was received into membership he was given a printed statement of the church's form of admission and confession of faith. He placed it carefully among his papers, and there it was recently discovered by his son. Here are the beliefs to which the Williams undergraduates of two generations ago unhesitatingly subscribed. Bidding the new members of the college church rise, the minister said to them:

"You have presented yourselves here to profess supreme love to God, to enter into a covenant with Him, and to incorporate yourselves with His visible people. This transaction is a solemn one. God and

angels are looking on. Your vows will be recorded in heaven, to be exhibited at your trial on the Last Day. Attend now to our confession of faith.

"You believe there is One God, subsisting in three coequal and coeternal Persons.

"You believe that the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

"You believe that in consequence of Adam's sin all his posterity are totally destitute of holiness.

"You believe that all men must be born again, and that those who are thus regenerated were chosen before the foundation of the world.

"You believe that Christ atoned for the sins of the world, and that he procured eternal life for those who believe.

"You believe there will be a resurrection of the body, that Christ will descend from heaven to judge the world, that he will receive his saints into his everlasting kingdom and that he will doom the wicked to everlasting fire." <sup>1</sup>

When the students of 1852 nodded their assent they had no idea that the Protestant world was facing an era of unprecedented change. They fancied that the beliefs to which they were subscribing would last indefinitely, and that the type

<sup>1</sup> In the author's private collection of manuscripts.

of church they saw in Williamstown would never fade. But they were mistaken. Within a decade there began a transformation, intellectual and social, which swept away the Calvinistic Christianity they knew and the type of church it had called into existence. The theory of evolution, advanced by Charles Darwin in 1859, upset the Biblical account of creation and the imposing structure of religious doctrine which successive generations had laboriously erected upon it. The modern study of the Bible, accepted more and more widely in the years after 1860, undermined the Calvinistic beliefs of which the Williams College confession of faith was an expression. New and unexpected social developments rendered the social institutions of 1852—churches included—obsolete, and forced on Protestantism the task of building a new type of church and devising a new type of church-program. All those changes lay just ahead, and yet the undergraduates of 1852 had little or no idea that this era of colossal transformation was about to begin.

Has the era yet reached its end? Most of us feel it has not. The tides of change which began

flowing eighty years ago are still moving with undiminished power. Obviously religious beliefs are still in a state of flux. Obviously social institutions of all types, churches included, are still in a process of reconstruction. As we survey the vast changes which have occurred since 1852, and as we realize other changes equally extensive may lie ahead, a sobering question rises in the mind. Will the New Protestantism emerging to-day survive all these changes? Will the liberal churches in which so much thought and effort are now being invested be able to maintain themselves in the decades just ahead?

## II

There are several situations in the modern world which are clearly unfavorable to such a movement as the New Protestantism, particularly in its organized expression. To begin with, all churches are now confronted with a new and intense competition. Part of it is provided by the thousand-and-one diversions which the modern community offers its citizens, particularly those who are well-to-do. Part of it is provided by the

scores of charitable and philanthropic organizations which have recently come into existence and which, when all is said, draw most of their personal as well as financial support from the so-called "church group." By the time the average citizen has read his Sunday paper, entertained his Sunday guests, played his Sunday golf, made his Sunday trip to the country, and slept long enough on Sunday morning to recuperate from the effects of a protracted social gathering Saturday night, he usually finds the claims of the church have been somehow overlooked. By the time the religiously minded individual has done his share, through six days of almost uninterrupted effort, for the Y.M.C.A., the Boy Scouts, the Red Cross, the Community Chest, and the dozen other welfare organizations which demand his time and interest as well as his money, the prospect of working for the church on Sunday has singularly little appeal. It is in the face of this intense and unprecedented competition that the modern church must carry on. The remarkable fact is not that so many churches are now losing their prestige and their power. The remarkable fact is that a

few churches are maintaining and even increasing their effectiveness.

Meantime a second difficulty has arisen to perplex the liberal churches. Their ministers possess only a limited authority and exercise only a limited influence. Compare the situation of a fundamentalist preacher, a Catholic priest, and the minister in a liberal Protestant church. Behind the pronouncements of the fundamentalist stands (so his hearers believe) the august authority of a divinely inspired and inerrant Bible. When the preacher has made a statement and substantiated it by an array of proof-texts, his point is established. There can be no further argument. Behind the pronouncements of the Catholic priest stands (so his hearers believe) the double authority of an inerrant Bible and an infallible Church. When the priest explains a doctrine, quotes his texts, and then shows that the Church has taught this doctrine from the beginning, there is no retort to be made. The truth of the doctrine has been established. But what is the position of the minister in a liberal Protestant church? He cannot appeal to an inerrant Bible or an infallible

Church, for neither he nor his hearers believe in either. All he can do is appeal to the witness of experience and reason, and state as clearly as may be the inductions which he himself draws from the mass of facts experience and reason provide. As every liberal preacher soon discovers, this is apt to be a disappointing procedure. Many of the people in the congregation dispute the facts on which the preacher bases his arguments, and others question the accuracy of his inductions. When the sermon is ended everyone feels free to disagree with the minister. All this explains why the liberal minister of to-day wields an authority and exercises an influence far less impressive than those exerted by the ministers of an earlier day. It also explains why many people, listening to the sermons of a modern liberal, feel there is no "authority" behind the teaching and that the minister "proves" nothing. Amid such difficulties it is no small achievement to win and hold the intellectual respect and personal confidence of a sizeable group of well-educated, discriminating, and intellectually independent people. The wonder is not that so many liberal

ministers fail in this effort. The wonder is that so many succeed.

Do these unfavorable conditions mean that our liberal churches are likely to disappear within the next few decades? Certainly not. Those churches will endure because there is in every community to-day a well-defined group deeply and permanently interested in liberal religion. This group forms as definite a part of the population as the group interested in music, drama, or international affairs. This so-called "church group" has perpetuated itself for many centuries, and undoubtedly will continue to do so for many centuries yet to come. This group will always need churches, want churches, and support churches, just as other groups in the population will always want theaters, art museums, symphony orchestras, or organizations to discuss international relationships. It is to this small but permanent group that the New Protestantism will address itself, and from this group that it will draw its support. Obviously the New Protestantism will not appeal to everyone. Obviously it will not exert on the population as a whole the type of pressure which



certain forms of Christianity have exerted in the past. But it will have its following, and among those who understand and appreciate its aims it will create an enduring loyalty. Is this not the story of every new religious movement?

### III

What is the work liberal churches will have to do in the America of to-morrow? What are the tasks and the opportunities confronting the New Protestantism? One task is to teach clearly and effectively the new interpretation of Christianity and the new theory of life's meaning. The vast process of change which began in the religious world eighty years ago is still continuing with scarcely abated power. The indications are that it will not reach its end for many years, possibly many decades, to come. This means that more and more people with discerning minds will gradually abandon the interpretation of life popularized by the orthodox Protestantism of the past. As these people break away from the religious traditions and habits of yesterday they will tend to give their children less and less instruc-

tion in religion and less and less information about religion. This is the situation we already discover in numberless American homes. The responsibility thus laid on the New Protestantism is only too plain. In the coming years our liberal churches must put a new faith in place of the old. They must give men and women, boys and girls, the new convictions about God, life, and destiny which are even now beginning to supplant those of yesterday.

The New Protestantism must also devise and put into effective operation a new system of ethical training and character building. The waning influence of the traditional Sunday school has long been noted, while the need of the modern community for an ampler supply of socially minded citizens has become steadily more apparent. The situation thus emerging lays on the New Protestantism a grave responsibility. In the years just ahead our liberal churches must create a new system of ethical training and character building which will touch not only the boys and girls reached by the Sunday School but also the adults who are in contact with the church and

its subsidiary organizations. Both groups, young and old, must be made acquainted with the actual problems emerging in modern life, with the ethical and religious issues underlying these problems, and with the solutions of these problems offered by competent authorities. Furthermore, both groups must be roused to try to solve these problems, and taught that in a life of intelligent and effective citizenship the greatest satisfactions men know can be gained. To devise and perfect such a system of character-education, such a school for good citizenship, will be to make a contribution of unimaginable value to the life of the new America. The happier and more fraternal social order for which the whole world is now striving cannot be brought into being by the effort of a few leaders scattered here and there. That better world can be created only through the struggle of millions of inconspicuous men and women, spread through every community. To the task of training members of that vast army the New Protestantism must dedicate itself. When the ultimate triumph finally comes, and the new world—purged of war, of preventable poverty,

of racial and religious intolerance, and of economic injustice—finally emerges in splendor, the liberal churches of this land and every land will have the right to claim credit for a significant share in the achievement.

There is one other responsibility confronting the New Protestantism. It must give individuals fresh courage for the tasks of daily life. When, toward the end of the nineteenth century, applied science began to revolutionize the conditions of daily existence, many observers thought that in the twentieth century life would become fabulously easy for everyone. That expectation has not been fulfilled. During the last four decades daily existence has grown more rather than less exhausting. Though some of our external problems—such as the problem of transporting ourselves readily from place to place, or the problem of communicating instantly and simultaneously with great numbers of people—have been solved, most of our inner problems still remain as perplexing as ever. Where can we find strength to carry the heavy burdens piled upon us? What are the sources of mental and emotional poise? How

can we gain hope and confidence as we face the strange adventure of life and the still stranger adventure of death? Face to face with these inner problems, the men and women of our time desperately need help. In particular they need courage—courage to continue working, struggling, hoping.

Come, Courage, come  
And take me by the hand!  
I have a long and weary way to go  
And what may be the end I do not know,  
I cannot understand.  
Come, Courage, come  
And take me by the hand! <sup>2</sup>

That is the pitiful cry of numberless men and women in the modern world. The New Protestantism must equip itself to meet their need.

#### IV

As our liberal churches address themselves to these tasks can they claim the name of Christ? Is such work as this distinctively Christian?

<sup>2</sup> Clinton Scollard, in *American Mystical Verse*, p. 251. Reprinted by permission of Mrs. Clinton Scollard.

True Christianity is not the mass of theological doctrines worked out by Paul and John, taken over by early Catholicism, rephrased by Luther and Calvin, and finally codified in such a statement as the one read at Williams College in 1852. True Christianity is the little group of creative ideas taught by Jesus himself, together with the new spirit of kindness and confidence which flowed from those ideas. As the New Protestantism gives people courage, as it builds socially-valuable character, as it offers the modern world a new and a more intelligent answer to the riddle of life, as it creates in human hearts an abiding faith in God's nearness and help, it may not be perpetuating the ancient theological system. But it is perpetuating Jesus' essential convictions and spreading his spirit. Because it does these things it can, so some of us believe, fairly claim his name.













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